Disrupting Disproportionality: An Examination of Culturally Relevant Leadership Approaches to School Discipline in Urban Education

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Abstract

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This qualitative research study was conducted to ascertain how urban school leaders conceptualized school discipline policies in ways that supported the education of students of color as well as how their values and beliefs informed the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that supported the education of students of color. Urban school leadership participants' experience was primarily in the nation's largest school district, New York City. Two research questions guided the framework of this study: (a) How do urban school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined? and (b) How do the values and beliefs of urban school leaders inform their implementation of school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color? Qualitative research methodology was used for this study. Data were collected through individual interviews with participants and expert participants. The findings and data analysis constructed a road map for culturally relevant school leaders to conceptualize and implement school discipline policies to support students of color in schools and change the way they were disciplined.

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I would like to thank so many people who made this journey a reality for me. First and foremost, I want to thank God, for it is because of him I am able to exist and live with purpose. Te alabo Jehova. Amen.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family; those that share my heritage and DNA and those that have become family over time. I stand here today because of all of you. Thank you for the unconditional support, love and care.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

On May 25, 2020, a White male police officer placed his knee on the neck of a Black male lying on the ground for over 9 minutes, eventually cutting off his airways and suffocating him to death. The name of that Black male was George Floyd. Mr. Floyd's murder made worldwide headlines as a result of a cell phone video recorded by one of the witnesses. As difficult as it was to watch Mr. Floyd gasp for his last breath after 9 minutes and eventually become unresponsive, I also thought of the 9-year-old girl who witnessed the entire murder. How would this 9-year-old return to school and process what she had seen on a daily basis? What does she see in her school when it comes to the discipline of her Black peers? This cross-section of what happens in our society today has a direct connection with how students of color are supported and disciplined by school leaders and staff in public schools. School discipline data across the country highlight the disproportional number of students of color who receive exclusionary disciplinary measures, compared to their White peers (APA Task Force on Zero Tolerance Policies, 2008; Fergus, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Noguera, 2003, 2008, 2016; Okilwa et al., 2017; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Reyes, 2006; Sander & Bibbs, 2020; Skiba et al., 2000; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

While history was made with the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the Supreme Court, desegregation was something many did not want to see in schools across this country (Horsford, 2010a). This resulted in a mandated ruling to abolish segregation. Fifty years later, segregation remains, with some school systems more segregated than ever. Efforts persist in the 21st century as school systems have found new ways to segregate students of color. A historic struggle between the concepts of excellence and equality has pervaded the politics of

American education since its inception and continues today (Gittell, 1998). Urban schools have been faced with the greatest feat—that of educating and preparing urban students who, many times, face the severest of hardships in and out of the classroom. Poverty, crime, and other contributing factors that many urban communities face hinder and often prevent students in urban classrooms to meet grade learning standards (Delpit, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

When students are out of the classroom, students cannot learn. It is as simple as that. The disproportional discipline of students of color out of school systematically removes them from classroom learning opportunities; as a result, they miss more days of instruction and, ultimately, are left further and further behind academically, compared to their White peers (APA Task Force on Zero Tolerance Policies, 2008; Fergus, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Okilwa et al., 2017; Noguera, 2003, 2008, 2016; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Reyes, 2006; Sander & Bibbs, 2020; Skiba et al., 2000; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). In 2013-2014, 2.6 million students—5.3% out of a little over 49 million students in public schools—received one or more out-of-school suspensions; 13.7% were Black students—the largest student group receiving out-of-school suspensions, followed by 6.7% American Indian/Alaska Native students, 5.3% Multiracial students, 4.5 Latino and Pacific Islander students, 3.4% White students, and 1.1% Asian students—the lowest group (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018). According to a report from the New York Equity Coalition (2018), New York schools had a total of 66,000 out-of-school suspensions for students during the 2016-2017 school year. This is the equivalent, on average, of one student per minute for every hour of the school day (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Black students outside of New York City were 4.2 times more likely to be suspended than White students,

American Indian students were 2.6 times more likely to be suspended than White students and Latino students were 1.4 times more likely to be suspended than White students (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). When looking at the total enrollment of students outside of New York City, Black students only represented 10% of enrollment but 31% of all students who were suspended at least once; this highlights the notable disproportional suspension rates between Black and White students (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). The disproportionality is even greater when examining the suspension data in New York City schools. During the 2016-2017 school year, 1.8% of Black students, .8% of Latino students, .6% American Indian students, .3% White students, .3% Multiracial students, and .2% Asian students received at least one out-of-school suspension (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). While Black students only represented 23% of enrollment in New York City schools, they were a total of 50% of all students who were suspended at least once (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Setting aside the loss of learning in the classroom, students who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school, increasing the risk of future incarceration (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Disproportionality of student disciplinary measures can be assessed at the school level as well as district level and can include other subgroups such as special education, gender, English language learners within the same racial or ethnic group. Schools that are comprised of students of color can still exhibit patterns of disproportionality regarding student disciplinary measures. School leaders play a critical role in supporting students of color in their schools to decrease the overrepresentation of students of color receiving exclusionary discipline measures.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I examined how self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders conceptualized school discipline policies in ways that supported the education of students of

color. I also examined how the values and beliefs of these self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders informed the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that supported the education of students of color. To investigate this purpose fully, it was critical to understand how school disciplinary measures have evolved over time and, most significantly, how they vary for students of color compared to White students. My research questions focused on how self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders in New York City conceptualized discipline policies that support the education of students of color and how self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders' values and beliefs informed their implementation of discipline policies that supported the education of students of color. I was also able to gather information from expert participants who had over three decades of experience in urban schools in and out of New York City, which provided additional participant insight and context to this study.

With this in mind, I found it necessary to explore how race has impacted schooling and, ultimately, disciplinary measures in schools throughout the years. One could argue that current-day exclusionary discipline measures and policies continue to segregate students of color away from classrooms, limiting their academic growth and development, and ultimately increasing the likelihood of their dropping out of school and being incarcerated. Almost 60 years later, segregation remains, with some school systems highly segregated. Even in the 21st century, school systems have implemented new ways to continue segregating students of color. Attention to this issue has been given by many past presidential administrations, particularly by former

President Barack Obama, who often described these large race- and class-based achievement gaps as morally and economically unacceptable (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

As a result, schools are now struggling with a more complicated fabric of educational inequality in 21st century schools (Horsford, 2011). When school leaders continuously suspend Black students at higher rates than their White counterparts, they are perpetuating segregation by removing Black students from their school programs. Disproportional suspension rates are not unique to Black students today; Latino students are also affected by this practice. There is an established pattern of inequality between the disciplinary measures used for African American and Latino students and those used for their White peers (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2003). Such inequity regarding the way African American and Latino students are disciplined frequently expel them from the school building for many days (Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002), resulting in loss of instructional days and, consequently, leaving them further and further behind academically, compared to their White peers (Reyes, 2006).

Urban schools have been faced with the greatest problem to resolve—educating and preparing urban students who face the severest hardships both in and out of their classrooms. A historic struggle between the concepts of excellence and equality has pervaded the politics of American education since its inception and persists today (Gittell, 1998). As Noguera (2008) wrote, “Education should serve as a ladder out of poverty” (p. x). Schools serving minority students experience different challenges which can impact academic ability and growth, often contributing to the ongoing cycle of poverty and undereducated minorities in this country (Cochran, 1991; Jackson & Davis, 2000). There is a stark measure of disproportionality regarding disciplinary data between different student subgroups (Skiba et al., 2002). For

example, disciplinary disproportionality has had an impact on the educational outcomes of African American and Latino students (NCES, 2003).

Research Questions

My research questions focused on how self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders conceptualized current school discipline policies in ways that changed the way students of color were disciplined and how their values and beliefs informed their implementation of school discipline policies to support students of color. In other words, I wanted to know how these self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders understood and processed school discipline policies to increase classroom learning for students of color and decrease exclusionary practices for students of color. I also wanted to know how the values and beliefs of these self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders informed the implementation of the school discipline policies to increase classroom learning for students of color and decrease exclusionary practices for students of color. I identified the participants in this study as culturally relevant school leaders (CRSL) because their leadership practices embodied those of the CRSL Framework (Khalifa et al., 2016): culturally self-reflecting on leadership behaviors; developing culturally responsive teachers; promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environment; and engaging students, parents, and indigenous contexts. Participants' successful school environments and school turn-around leadership capabilities identified them as excellent candidates for this study, highlighting their tenure as leaders for equity, engagement and excellence. For the purposes of this study, I defined equity as a multidimensional theoretical construct derived from concepts of fairness, social justice, and human agency articulated in several disciplines (Harris & Bensimon, 2007). For the purposes of this study, I defined urban education as typically diverse, characterized by large enrollments and complexity, many

struggling with growth (and those schools), often serving students representing many ethnic minorities, multiple, languages, and having a greater concentration of the poor (Heindel, 2005, p. 1). I refer to the term urban within a schooling context as a school that is predominantly comprised of students of color. I examined the concept of fairness regarding different student subgroups and school suspensions. I wanted to learn what impact, if any, culturally relevant school leaders' conceptualization and implementation of different disciplinary measures in education had on students of color.

These research questions lay at the center of my study:

1. How do urban school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined?
2. How do the values and beliefs of urban school leaders inform their implementation of school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color?

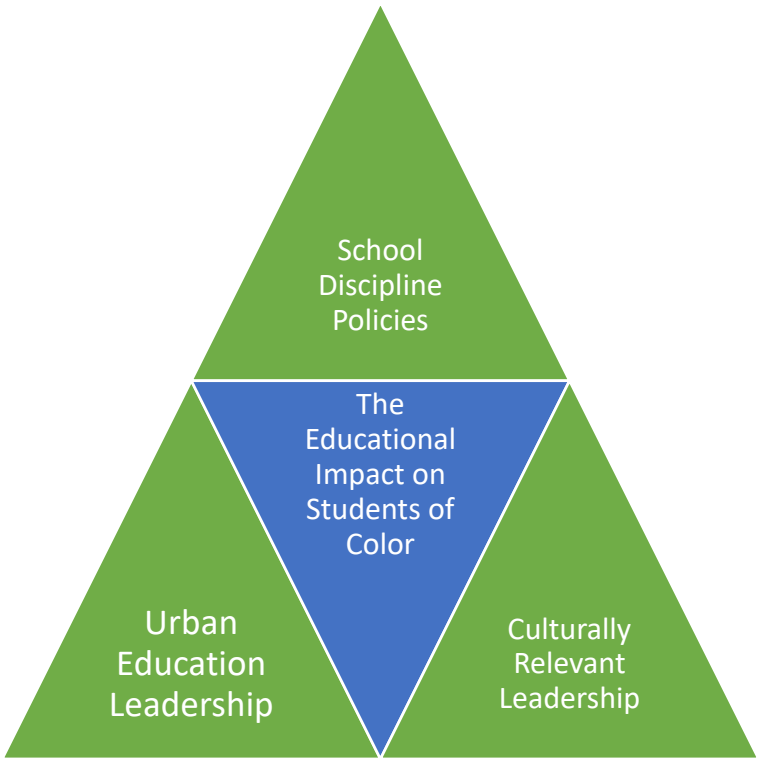
Significance of the Study

School leaders in diverse urban schools are the architects of school culture and school environments, which should be culturally responsive and representative of students' needs in order to place them at an advantage in comparison to their non-marginalized peers (Bazron et al., 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Changes in school climate and culture are ways to prepare teachers and staff to meet the needs of diverse students (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). School discipline plays a major role in school culture and climate of schools, particularly urban schools that are very diverse. Essentially, this study was created to contribute to the research that examines culturally relevant school leaders and the implementation of school discipline policies to support students of color in urban schools.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the framework that includes the three bodies of literature at the center of this study: urban education leadership, school discipline policies, and culturally relevant leadership/racial equity. When urban school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies through a culturally relevant leadership framework, they will positively impact the educational outcomes for students of color.

Figure 1. *Illustration of Conceptual Framework*



Summary of Methodology

I used a qualitative research design to explore a social problem where the researcher serves as the data collection instrument and deconstructs the individual experiences inductively by concentrating on the participant perspectives and meaning (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I decided to use qualitative research for this study because the way

school leaders in urban schools conceptualize school discipline policies and use their values and beliefs with the implementation of school discipline policies required additional examination. According to Glesne (1999), "To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions" (p. 5). The goal of this study was to identify how the values and beliefs of self-identified culturally relevant urban school principals informed the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that supported students of color as well as their conceptualization of school discipline policies in ways that changed how students were disciplined. Twelve semi-structed qualitative interviews allowed me to gather the perspectives, narratives, and accounts of culturally relevant school leaders with at least 5 years of experience as urban school principals. On average, interviews lasted 65 minutes, ranging from 35 minutes to 150 minutes. Participants' experience in school leadership ranged from 5 to over 11 years, and experience as superintendent district-level leadership, state-level leadership, consultant, and higher education professor ranged from 10 to over 40 years.

Limitations

This qualitative study was comprised of self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders with leadership experience from New York City. The focus of this study was to explore how self-identified culturally relevant urban school principals conceptualized school discipline policies in ways that changed the way students of color were disciplined and how their values and beliefs informed the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that supported the education of students of color. I selected to delimit this study to this particular population because I wanted to focus on principal decision making and actions, as they related to the implementation of school discipline and students of color. The demanding schedule of a

dissertation study and a full-time job resulted in time and financial constraints, which informed my decision to interview a total of 12 participants. Additionally, another constraint was the cost factor of the program and my ability to interview more than 12 people. Another limitation was identifying the data collected in my study as representative of all urban school principals who serve students of color.

Definitions of Terms

African American/Latino – Much of the literature on ethnic identity has viewed ethnic identity as a measure of how much one identifies with and participates in the practices of his or her ethnic group. Increasingly scholars have also indicated that there are variations in types of racial/ethnic identity (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2001; Sellers et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 1997). For the purposes of my study, I used the term within a school and/or classroom setting.

Culturally Relevant Leader – A leader who is aware of culture in the school context, with culture defined as "everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you" (Lindsey et al., 2009, pp. 24-25).

Discipline - Any exclusionary discipline practice, suspension, or expulsion that removes students from their day-to-day school program (The Status of School Discipline in State Policy) (Education Commission of the States, 2019).

Disproportionality – The unequal representation of races within a suspension data set from a school, in relation to their overall enrollment in the school.

Diversity – The specific meaning of the term *diversity* is given as "differences among grounds of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender,

exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2006, p. 3). For the purposes of my study, I used the term within a school and/or classroom setting. I also used the term *highly diverse* schools as meaning those with at least 50% African American and/or Latino enrollment.

Educational Equity – In a global society, educational equity is about providing transformative learning experiences for students who require such experiences for social mobility, as well as social and cultural reproduction for students already on top (Jordan, 2010).

Equitable Suspension Rates – The over-representation of a particular race within a suspension data set from a school.

Equity – A multidimensional theoretical construct derived from concepts of fairness, social justice, and human agency articulated in several disciplines (Harris & Bensimon, 2007).

Organizational Culture - The shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together (Killman et al., 1986, p. 89).

Race – Race theory is the recurrently encountered folk belief that humans can be partitioned into distinct types on the basis of their concrete, observable constitution. The notion of observable constitution captures the following features of racial thinking: Racial differences are thought to encompass nonobvious or inner qualities (including moral and mental ones) as well as outward physical ones (Hirschfeld, 1996).

Relative Risk Ratio – A comparison of risk for one group in relation to the risk for all other groups (Fergus, 2013).

School Discipline Policy – For the purposes of this study, I defined this term as the collection of disciplinary measures enacted by a school or school district to address prescribed disciplinary infractions as outlined by school administration.

Sensemaking – Processes by which people seek to understand ambiguous, equivocal, or confusing issues or events (Colville et al., 2012; Maitlis, 2005; Wieck, 1995).

Urban Education – Typically diverse, characterized by large enrollments and complexity, many struggling with growth (and those schools), often serving students representing many ethnic minorities, multiple, languages, and having a greater concentration of the poor (Heindel, 2005, p. 1).

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore fully how self-identified culturally relevant urban school leaders conceptualized school discipline policies in ways that changed how students of color were disciplined and how their values and beliefs supported the education of students of color, I examined three key bodies of literature: urban education leadership, school discipline policies, and culturally relevant leadership. These three bodies of literature lay at the center of the conceptual framework of this study, and I present an overview of each of these in this chapter.

Over 100 years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated train cars for Blacks were legal as long as they were equal to Whites (Gittell, 1998). After the *Brown* decision, the notion of separate but equal transcended to educational institutions, whereby separate schools for Black students were legal as long as they were deemed equal to White schools (Gittell, 1998). The struggle to create equitable learning opportunities and experiences for students of all backgrounds in this country continues to be felt today. Transforming schools into equitable learning environments for students lies at the heart of school improvement. Policies across the country frequently place the school principal at the center of school improvement (Crawford, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2008). A number of demands are placed on school leaders from evaluating teachers to creating equitable discipline systems (Coburn, 2006; Donaldson et al., 2016; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Rigby, 2014). One of the most challenging components of school improvement for which principals are responsible is school discipline. Changing the tone and academic outcomes of students in chronically underperforming schools has set the principal as "critically important both in triggering the initial change and in acting as teacher during the ensuing steps" (Stopford & Baden-Fuller, 1990, as cited in Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 337).

These principals are often identified as "turnaround" principals who possess the knowledge and skills to create rapid and deep change that shifts educator practice and improves student outcomes (West et al., 2014). Along with the many challenges that urban school communities face when preparing urban students for academic achievement and higher learning, there is now an emphasized focus on equity in schools (Delpit, 2012; Fergus, 2016; Fergus et al., 2014; Noguera, 2008). This complex role can be even more challenging in urban school settings. There remains a gap in the field's understanding of urban school leadership and the use of school discipline policies to support students of color in school.

As stated by Dr. Rudy Crew, former Chancellor of New York City public schools and former Superintendent of Miami Dade County schools, "If we are not able to give all of our citizens a future, then the disenfranchised will either implode and destroy themselves or explode in our own front yards and most assuredly destroy us" (Delpit, 2012, p. 202). The concept of equality in schools and quality education for disenfranchised students has been coined the "new Civil Rights agenda" by Dr. Robert Moses (Delpit, 2012, p. 195). Such imagery and perception allude to the notion of "twoness," as explained by DuBois (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014), which is the notion of Black students entering schools and being subjected to the imposition of the White culture as the standard by which they are judged.

Urban Education Leadership

For the past 200 years, urban school leaders have strived to provide students of color with an adequate education. Many would argue that they have failed, despite their efforts (Barton & Coley, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Hrabowski, 2004; Krueger & Whitmore, 2001; Lee, 2002, National Commission of Teaching and America's Future, 2007; Paige & Witte, 2010; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2009). Urban schools in the United States fail students who live in poverty

at much higher rates (Ahram et al., 2011; Theoharis, 2009; Wright, 2012). Urban schools are plagued with many circumstances including: segregation, poverty, inadequate material resources, failed reform efforts, high school dropout rates, teacher flight, institutionalized White racism, underachievement, and the school-to-prison pipeline (Khalifa & Alston, 2015). While facets of the school make-up have changed, including school structure, student supports, and learning environments, urban schools continue to miss the mark (Khalifa & Alston, 2015). Urban education leadership focuses on leadership strategies and methods that can improve the learning outcomes for students, specifically in urban school settings. Factors such as disciplinary problems resulting from poverty and crime, among others, impact urban classrooms and may prevent students from learning in the classroom (Delpit, 2012). The intersections between poverty, student learning, and school discipline are all important components of urban education, especially how these factors impact urban students' long-term success. According to the USDOE (2018), during the 2015-2016 school year, 52.1% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. This was a 13.8% increase over the previous 15 years, when 38.3% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch during the 2000-2001 school year (USDOE, 2018). Additionally, some state governments and municipalities utilize third grade student achievement scores/levels to predict how many prisons to build in the future (Khalifa & Alston, 2015). This is a glaring reminder of how serious the academic achievement of urban students is and the responsibility urban school leaders have, especially when the underachievement of students of color results in the construction of another prison. Many factors can contribute to disciplinary problems in school; poverty, crime, and other factors prevent students from learning in the classroom (Delpit, 2012). Before students can learn, they have to feel safe in the classroom and school community. While urban education leadership embodies a collective of key staff and personnel, it is largely

represented by the school principal who is responsible for the school community as a whole. With a growing focus on equitable learning opportunities for students of color, there is an even greater need to understand how school discipline affects the learning opportunities of students of color in schools. One area of focus in school discipline is the examination of student suspension rates and the disproportionality between suspensions of students of color and White students (Fergus, 2016; Fergus et al., 2014; Noguera, 2008). When students of color are disciplined more frequently than their White peers, it has a direct impact on the amount of time they spend in the classroom and on their yearly academic growth (APA Task Force on Zero Tolerance Policies, 2008; Fergus, 2016; Girvan et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Okilwa et al., 2017; Noguera, 2003, 2008, 2016; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Reyes, 2006; Sander & Bibbs, 2020; Skiba et al., 2000; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). There is increasing concern regarding the data that have emerged on disproportional student suspensions and the link between suspended students of color and the school-to-prison pipeline (Fergus 2016; Fergus et al., 2014).

The Urban School Principal

Urban school districts face a series of complex challenges (Beckett, 2018). Larger cities more often have children who live in poverty, and urban schools are more often associated with lower achievement rates for students, higher student dropout rates, and low student attendance (Hanushek, 2014; Noguera, 2003). More often, the majority of children attending urban schools are below grade level in math and reading, and are taught by less experienced classroom teachers (Hanushek, 2014; Langford et al., 2002; Noguera, 2008). Additionally, urban schools often afford students their only source of stability, many of whom may experience instability outside of the school as a result of homelessness, poverty, and gang violence (Noguera, 2008).

Many researchers have noted an interest in understanding the make-up of successful schools that face challenging sociocultural circumstances (Harris, 2002; Harris & Chapman, 2002). Such schools with challenging circumstances often share challenging aspects such as (a) students from families coping with poverty or unemployment, (b) a student population dominated by a nonhegemonic ethnicity or having a multiethnic composition, (c) high ratio of students who have not mastered the teaching language, (d) parents who do not sufficiently support the students' learning, and (e) challenging sociospatial location (e.g., urban inner city, rural) (Ainscow et al., 2006; Hargreaves & Harris, 2015; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Reynolds et al., 2001). School leaders who embody both transformational and transactional behaviors are requisites for schools with challenging conditions (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Often, schools with challenging landscapes cope with outcomes of oppressive social parameters and public policies that make students' comprehension, school support of learning, and home support of learning challenging (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2006; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2004). Another important aspect of urban school leadership is school climate and discipline. Evidence has suggested that a portion of principals' effects may be exerted through their impact in school climate (Steele et al., 2020).

The school principal is responsible for creating a positive school culture and environment where all students can succeed. School culture is determined by the values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of the various stakeholders within the school's community and reflects the school's social norms (Groseschl & Doherty, 2000). A key element that resonates with the description of a positive school culture is a sense of collaboration and collaborative efforts put forth by all members of the school community and a focus on continuous improvement (Brendefur et al., 2014; Deal & Peterson, 2009, 2016; DuFour, 2008; Louis & Marks, 1998; Quinlan, 2017). While

maintaining and managing the school community as a whole and cultivating the landscape for a positive school environment and climate, urban school principals balance other tasks as well. Schools with a large representation of various races, socioeconomic levels, and families with differing educational backgrounds comprise many urban schools across many school districts. In a 2014 study, Fergus et al. noted that the school environment and culture should include the following components for students of color to thrive: a sense of belonging, the presence of a multicultural perspective, the elimination of stereotypes, a sense of safety in and out of the school environment, and an overall sense of a fair school environment. Managing student disciplinary infractions can involve a series of processes that lead to different possible outcomes of disciplinary consequences: (a) the teacher determination of misbehavior, (b) the teacher reaction of said misbehavior, and (c) the reaction of the school leader and disciplinary referral (Beachum & Gullo, 2019). Another aspect of school leadership regarding the implementation of school discipline is that of positionality. School leaders' ability to use their personal authority, depending more often on the development of relationships (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003) as opposed to their positional authority regarding the implementation of school discipline policies in their school communities will also impact the overall tone and environment of the school community.

The decisions that the urban school leader make play a vital role in the development of the school environment and climate. It is critical to understand the values and beliefs of school leaders and the examination of implicit bias since there lies an intersection between those values and beliefs and school policy making.

New York City School Leadership

While there are many components in school leadership as a whole, particular components within the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Public Schools must be noted

within the framework of this study. It is important to understand how New York City Schools have changed over the years as this can provide insight into the changes and demands of New York City principals. New York City public schools began to change the way they served students and focused on student learning in 1992 through the creation of small-theme high schools across the city (Ancess & Allen, 2006). I include research on school size and school transformation in this section because it outlines the initial work that the NYCDOE carried out to improve and increase student learning. Despite the reduction of many large-size schools in the city, inequity in school discipline and suspensions still remained. While small schools, would initially serve as smaller school environments where more students would thrive, it did not eliminate the overrepresentation of African American and Latino students receiving school suspensions and other disciplinary measures. The idea of creating smaller schools by theme or interest would inherently engage alienated students and increase their interest and commitment to graduate (Ancess & Allen, 2006). Sorting schools by interest as opposed to home neighborhoods would produce diverse schools that would create integrated classrooms, stimulating competition for families and, according to market theory, increasing the number of good high schools and, ultimately, producing a system of excellence and equity (Ancess & Allen, 2006).

The supervision of school discipline rests solely on the school principal; due to size and make-up of schools, this task may be even more challenging in New York City than in other parts of the country. New York City school principals report to their school district superintendents. School superintendents report to their Executive Superintendents who report to the School Chancellor. All schools operate under the Chancellor's Regulations, which include the Discipline code that outlines all infraction codes and levels for all disciplinary measures. All infractions are entered in the City's Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS) within 24

hours of an incident. While there are many layers of oversight and administrators in the Department, school principals are left to make day-to-day decisions on their own. Only the very dangerous incidents require notification to the Superintendent and Safety Borough Director—namely, the use of weapons, bodily injury requiring transportation to the hospital, and school building conditions requiring police or fire. With the ongoing demands of day-to-day school operations, the principal is responsible for ensuring that protocols are followed, incidents are reported, and all students in the building are safe.

School Discipline in Urban School Systems

When students of color receive disproportional exclusionary discipline measures that remove them out of the classroom, they are left academically further behind than their White peers (Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Reyes, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002). These exclusionary measures also increase the likelihood of students of color entering the juvenile justice system (Hyman & Perone, 1998; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Rios & Galicia, 2013; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). When comparing incarceration rates of adults in this country, African Americans are imprisoned at considerably higher rates than their White counterparts (Tsoi-A-Fatt, 2010). In order to understand fully how such a discrepancy in incarceration rates has become prevalent in this country, it is necessary to examine suspension and disciplinary policies in school systems (Tsoi-A-Fatt, 2010). The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) has become an integral part of urban school leadership. The school-to-prison pipeline is the result of zero tolerance discipline policies, often times embedded in school discipline policies across the country (Wald & Losen, 2003). Many of these exclusionary discipline policies include referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Raffaele Mendez, 2003; Reyes, 2006). In addition to these exclusionary practices, there are additional measures that have proven to be consequential

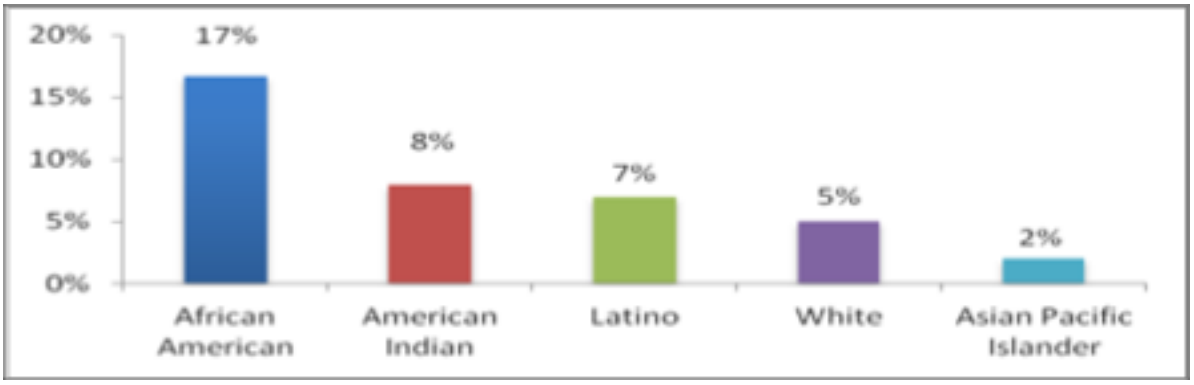
in fueling the school-to-prison pipeline such as school resource officers (SRO), strip searches, metal detectors and surveillance cameras in schools (Dohrn, 2011; Eisenbraun, 2007; Rios & Galicia, 2013: Theriot, 2009). These practices facilitate relationships between schools and juvenile justice systems on top of an overall punitive learning environment for students (Hyman & Perone, 1998; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Rios & Galicia, 2013; Skiba et al., 2002).

The 1994 Gun Free Schools Act developed under President Bill Clinton was created to keep guns out of schools and reduce incidents of violence related to guns in order to promote order and civility (Gun Free Schools Act of, 1993). On the contrary, a heightened sense of student victimization has been the result, along with hyper-criminalization (Hyman & Perone, 1998; Rios, 2007). There has been a dramatic change in the way school leaders utilize zero tolerance policies not confined to guns, and great discretion is used resulting in disparaging results for young students of color. When comparing disciplinary measures for students, it has been found that detention, suspension, and expulsion rates are considerably higher for students of color than for their White counterparts (Tsoi-A-Fatt, 2010). According to a 2011 U.S. Department of Education Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey, Saenz and Ponjuan reported that 29.6% of Latino and 49.5% of Black male students in Grades 6-12 had been suspended from school, compared to 21.3% of their White male peers. Additionally, Black males had been expelled at a rate 13 times higher than that of their White peers (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

According to data released by the Office for Civil Rights (2010) that included almost half of the country's school districts serving 85% of all public school students, 3,081,240 students from Grades K-12 were suspended out of school at least once during the 2009-2010 academic

school year. As illustrated in Figure 2, the racial disparities between student groups are profound; nearly one out of every six African American students (17%), one in 12 Native American students (8%), and one in 14 Latino students (7%) were suspended at least once in 2009-2010. This is in contrast to the one in 20 White students (5%) and one in 50 Asian American students (2%) were suspended at least once in this country (Civil Rights Data Collection [CRDC], 2009-2010). This national estimate was based on data from every district in the Office for Civil Rights (2010) national sample.

Figure 2. *Percentage of Students Suspended at Least Once during the 2009-2010 School Year in the United States*

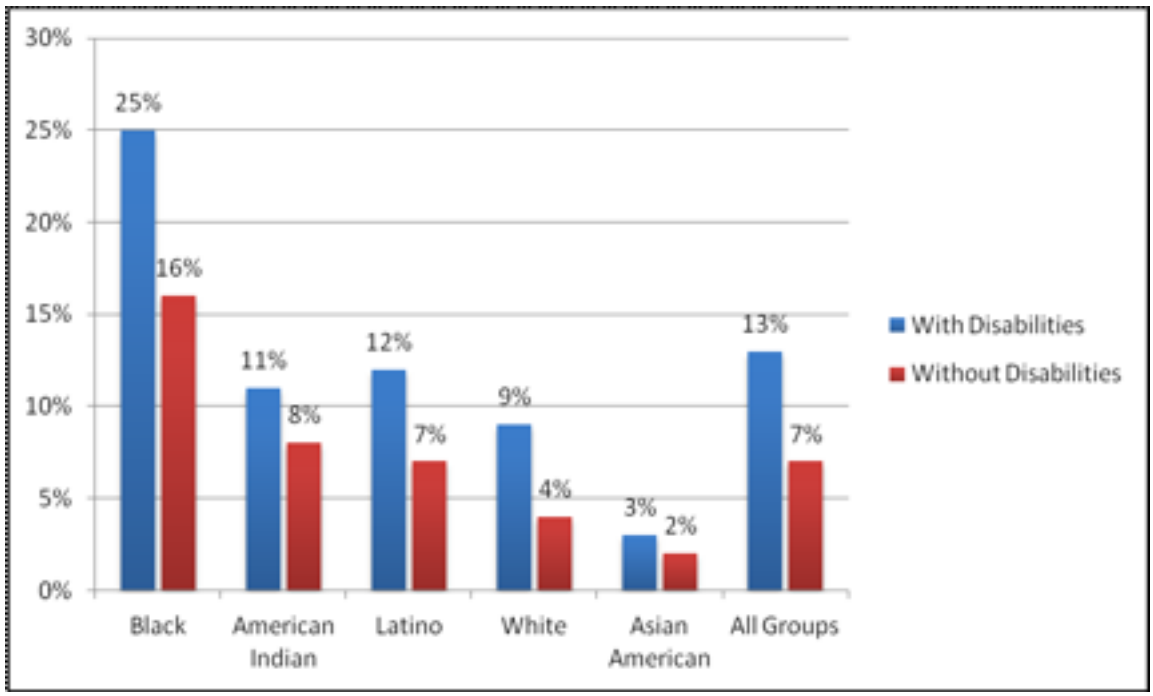


Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to whole numbers)

While students of color receive disproportional rates of school suspensions, there is also noticeable disproportionality among students with disabilities of color. Students in special education are suspended about twice as often as students who do not have disabilities (Office for Civil Rights, 2010). The percentage rates for all student racial subgroups were 13% for students with disabilities and 7% for students without disabilities. Students with disabilities are granted the right to supports and services that address behavioral issued related to their disability, and have protection under state and federal law that make it more difficult to suspend them for more than 10 school days (Kim et al., 2010). Despite laws that provide students with disabilities

protections from exclusionary discipline practices, students of color with disabilities receive more out-of-school suspensions than their White peers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Impact by Disability and Race of the Use of Out-of-school Suspensions during the 2009-2010 School Year in the United States*



Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to whole numbers)

At a national level, Black students with disabilities had the highest risk of being suspended two or more times in 2009-2010 (Office for Civil Rights, 2010). Table 1 illustrates how student subgroups were ranked by risk for being suspended two or more times. While Black students with disabilities had a higher risk for receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions, they also had the greatest difference, 6.6 percentage points, between the observed risk for multiple suspensions for students with disabilities and those with none.

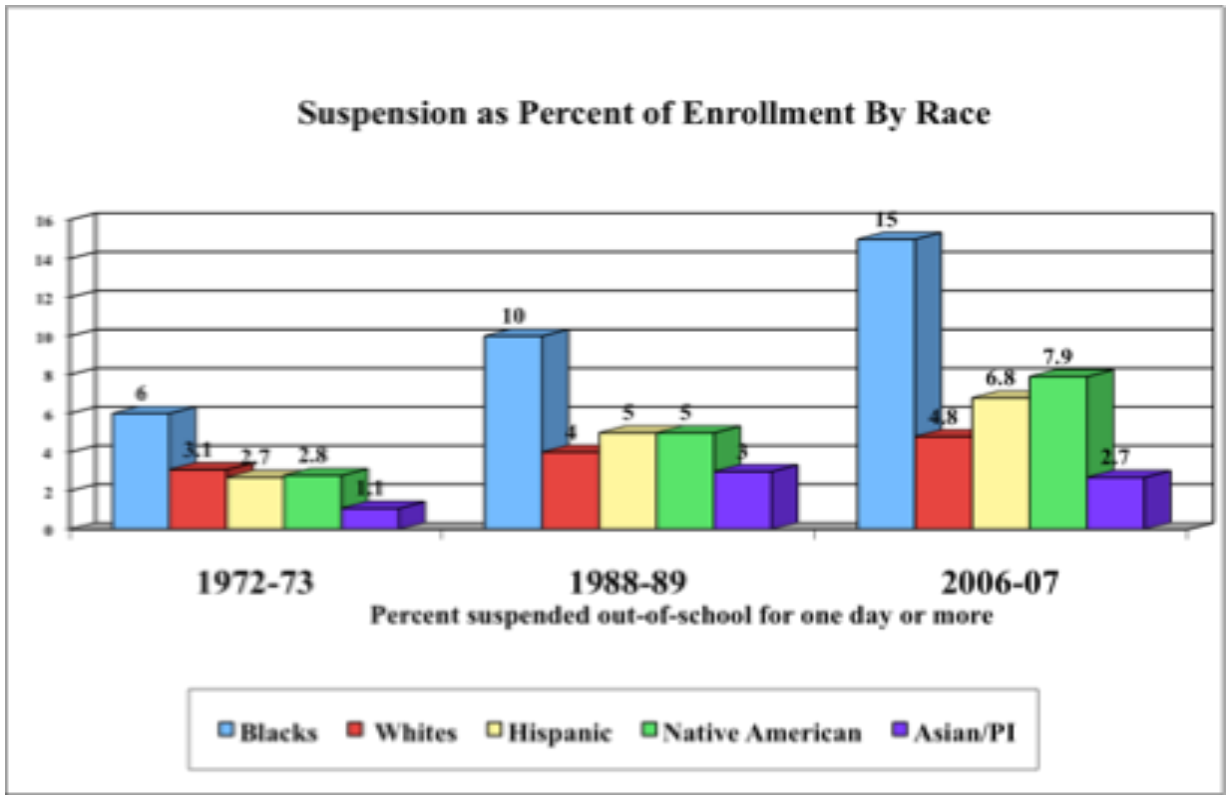
Table 1. *Out-of-school Suspension Risk by Student Race and Disability*

Percentage of Total Subgroup Enrolled (National Sample) Suspended Two or More Times		
Student Race/Ethnicity	Students with Disabilities	Students without Disabilities
African American	14%	7.4%
American Indian	5.6%	3.2%
Latino	5.9%	2.5%
White	4.1%	1.5%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.3%	0.6%

Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to one decimal)

To understand how disproportionality among students of color has changed over the years, suspension rates of students of color must be examined over time. Figure 4 illustrates the changes in suspension percentages by race over decades, beginning in 1972 and throughout 2007. While there are differences among the suspension rates of different students from different races over the years, the most noticeable change is for Black students. During the 1972-1973 school year, Black students received 6% of out-of-school suspensions; by 2006-2007, the percentage of Black students who received out-of-school suspensions had dramatically increased to 15%, illustrating the disproportionality among students of color with exclusionary discipline measures. What may not be noticeable is how frequent the use of suspensions is today, and that large racial gaps of 10 percentage points or more are very common, despite many districts not overly using suspensions in schools. In the Office for Civil Rights (2010) sample, 1,437 school districts suspended 3% or less of their Black enrolled students, 649 school districts suspended 3% or less of their enrolled students with disabilities, compared with the 1,678 school districts that suspended 3% or less for their White enrolled students. These data highlight the use of alternatives to out-of-school suspensions by districts across the country.

Figure 4. *Racial Impact of the Rising Use of Suspension*



Source: CRDC, 2009-2010 (numbers from national sample rounded to whole numbers)

Disproportionality in Discipline

School discipline disparity and inequalities by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability have become a noticeable component of academic research (Okilwa et al, 2017). This focus has been the topic of many research studies that continue to establish the persistence of disproportionality in discipline (Fabelo et al, 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008).

There have been significant and noticeable measures of disproportionality regarding disciplinary data between students of color and their White peers, specifically African American and Latino students (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2003; Skiba et al., 2002). Black and Latino students (among culturally and linguistically diverse students, refugees

and immigrants, and low-income students) are more likely to receive exclusionary disciplinary measures in school compared to their peers (Okilwa et al., 2012). In 2011, a historic statewide study in Texas examined suspension and expulsion data of nearly one million students in Grades 7-12, who were kept record of for at least 6 years (Fabelo et al., 2011). The study findings included approximately 60% of public school students who were suspended or expelled at least one time and had a much higher chance of repeating a grade, dropping out of school, or entering the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011). In a 2012 study, Losen and Gillespie reported that African American students were disproportionately suspended (17%) in K-12 as compared to Native Americans (8%), Latinos (7%), Whites (5%), and Asian Americans (2%). The study also pointed out disproportionality among students with disabilities (13%), as compared to approximately half of the students in general education (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

In another study entitled "Race is Not Neutral," Skiba and colleagues (2011) examined 364 elementary and middle school office referrals and found that African American students were two times (in elementary) and four times (in middle) to be referred to the office. Many more studies have articulated the correlation of repetitive disciplinary measures in school to these students and the impact on their lives, often resulting in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, identified as the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) phenomenon (Okilwa et al., 2017). The research has suggested that a number of oppressive practices contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline can be identified, reduced, and contested by strong leaders and leadership teams (Khalifa, 2012). The data collected in my study will contribute to the body of school leadership research that documents how school leaders identify, reduce, and contest oppressive practices and outcomes of school discipline policies.

Zero Tolerance Policy

While many would connect the Zero Tolerance Policy with the criminal court system, over the years it has become an integral part of the educational disciplinary system in the United States (Evans & Lester, 2012). Not surprisingly, the same overrepresentation of students with disabilities and emotional or behavioral problems in the juvenile justice system has continued with Zero Tolerance Policy and legislation (Rivkin, 2009). While the Zero Tolerance Policy first emerged in the criminal justice system, it was introduced to public schools in the 1990s with the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994. Initially, any student caught with a weapon received a mandatory 1-year expulsion from school; this mandatory expulsion was then modified over the years to include an array of other incidents that required their own set of mandatory consequences (Rivkin, 2009). While the GFSA was created to ensure safety in schools, it also provided great discretion to school administrators to modify the policy as they saw fit (Skibba & Peterson, 1999). Much of the criticism of said Zero Tolerance Policies is that as school administrators widened their definition of incidents that were punishable by expulsion and other overly punitive forms of school discipline, to what some have described as illogical, it removed students from school which excluded them from learning (Advancement Project, 2010; Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000; Rivkin, 2009). These drastic efforts to police schools and make them safer have led families to go to court as a result of the harsh and extreme punishments given to students and families alike. In the 1975 Supreme Court Case of *Goss v. Lopez*, the Court ruled that education could not be denied to a student as a result of poor behavior and required that schools provide equitable educational opportunities when students were removed from their traditional school placement for more than 10 days (Yell, 2012).

Schools, however, have found ways around requirements such as this, by providing alternative learning opportunities that many would claim are below standard and simply increase students' academics frustrations (Brown, 2007). According to Christle et al. (2004), students who receive suspensions for less than 10 days are not given any kind of learning placement and, consequently, are not given opportunities to make up missed work, which may increase the likelihood of school failure. Additionally, after the Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) was enacted for students with disabilities, schools could no longer make "long-term changes" in their school placement or even suspend them if the students' behavior was a manifestation of their disability. Despite these protections, special education students are still more likely to be removed, suspended, or expelled from school compared to their peers (Raffaele-Mendez et al., 2002). While the Zero Tolerance Policy emerged from the creation of the GFSA in 1994, other events before that led to the increase of school (over)policing. Over 30 years prior, the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) became an integral part of student discipline in school communities.

It is expected that schools maintain order and discipline to establish a safe and stable learning environment for all learners (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). As a result, schools have relied on the use of SROs, who hold more authority and power than classroom teachers, in an effort to maintain said discipline (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). The first recorded time SROs were utilized in schools was in 1953 in Flint, Michigan. It took another decade for the placement of police in school communities to spread, as implemented in Fresno, California in 1986 (Bracy, 2015). The SROs placed in Fresno schools by the Fresno police department began in plain-clothes capacity and were not intended as a punitive measure. In 1974, the Fresno police department included its Juvenile Bureau detectives in the local high schools to investigate

criminal activity that took place on school premises (Hamilton, 1996). Despite its success, SROs did not become widespread across U.S. schools until the mid-1990s. The horrific mass shooting in 1999 at Columbine High School as well as the rise of gang violence in schools led to an increase of police in school settings (Addington, 2009). In the decade between 1997 and 2007, there was an increase of 6,700 SROs (James & McCallion, 2013). While the current climate of school use of SROs has resulted in students being suspended and expelled from school, the initial purpose of SROs, according to the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), was to "develop a rapport with the students so that students trust them enough to either inform them about other classmates planning violent incidents or turn to SROs for help when they themselves are in trouble" (Mulqueen, 1999, p. 17). While much has changed over the years in school discipline and policies, it is clear that SROs have played a large role in overseeing and enforcing school disciplinary policies that have contributed to Zero Tolerance Policies and their overall impact on school environments.

Positive Behavior Intervention Systems

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) identify a framework of systematically organizing and implementing evidence-based behavioral supports for all students to promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes (James et al., 2019). PBIS includes multiple levels of support for students which will depend on the unique needs of the students in school (James et al., 2019). In general, PBIS continuously relies on data to inform decisions about the particular selection, implementation, and progress monitoring of all interventions for students across tiers (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). There are typically three tiers that differ by intensity with PBIS (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Tier 1 supports are created to prevent problem behavior from happening and are applied to all students in school (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

Supports in Tier 1 usually involve identifying three to five student expectations for behavior, defining those expectations, teaching expectations through modeling and feedback, and recognizing students who have met this expectation continuously throughout the school days (Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports, 2018a). About 10% to 15% of students will benefit from supplemental Tier 2 supports (James et al., 2019). Tier 2 supports may provide students with additional structure, additional acknowledgment for positive behavior, or additional training and practice with behavioral expectations (Horner & Sugai,2015). Tier 3 interventions are intended for use with students who have intense behavioral needs or not meeting adequate behavior progress after receiving both Tier 1 and 2 supports. One percent to five percent of students are supported by Tier 3 interventions, which include individualized evidence-based interventions, person-centered plans, and repetitive progress monitoring (Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, 2018c).

There have been several positive outcomes with school-wide positive behavior intervention systems (SWPBIS) related to student behavior and school climate (James et al., 2019). Research has shown SWPBIS to be linked to improved student behavior, healthier functioning of schools, more positive relationships with staff, and a reduction in suspensions and disciplinary referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2008, Bradshaw et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2012). Mixed research on the impact of academic achievement and SWPBIS identified a more indirect relationship with academics as compared to behavior (James et al., 2019). SWPBIS are believed to increase positive academic achievement, given that improved classroom behavior predicts future academic achievement for students (Lassen et al., 2006). While there exists a correlation between behavior and academic outcomes, some studies did not find significant positive

relationships between SWPBIS and academic outcomes for students (Caldarella et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2016). There was significant interest and focus on PBIS implementation and supports, as evidenced by the significant funding for PBIS by the USDOE from 2013 to 2018 to the School Climate Transformation Grant (James et al., 2019). PBIS has also served as a way for schools to increase the motivation and engagement of students.

A motivating and engaging school community has been linked to several positive outcomes (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Schools have a unique opportunity and responsibility to create a culture that supports students in developing their motivation, engagement, and self-improvement (Petrasek et al., 2021). One way schools can create these engaging and motivating environments is through the use of the PBIS framework. Motivation can play a major role in the development of students in school. Deci (1992) identified motivation as the underlying source of energy, purpose, and durability of behavior. Research has found that caring student-teacher relationships predicted the motivational outcomes of middle school students (Wentzel, 1997). Teacher enthusiasm has also been shown to support students' intrinsic motivation in school (Patrick et al., 2000). School staff and personnel develop different strategies and techniques to support and motivate students. Student motivation can be intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation can be useful when prompting students to behave in ways that may not be of interest to them (Petrasek et al., 2021). Internalization is the process of transforming external regulations and identifying them as one's own (Petrasek et al., 2021). When students move toward intrinsic motivation, they learn to modify external requests into personally acceptable self-regulatory behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). This process is key for students to internalize how their own behavior can contribute to individual success and create a positive school environment (Petrasek

et al., 2021). By better understanding the factors that motivate students in school settings, the task of using behavioral interventions and social supports for students becomes easier.

Over 26,000 schools are implementing PBIS (PBIS OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2019). PBIS is an evidence-based framework used for identifying, teaching, modeling, practicing, and acknowledging positive behavior that is in line with school-wide expectations (Petrasek et al., 2021). The emergence of PBIS was informed in the 1980s and 1990s by research on behavior support. While early work focusing on the individual application of positive behavioral interventions for students with behavior disorders did not produce desired system-wide school change, there was a shift to combine principles of behavior analysis, instructional practices, and classroom management to support an increase in positive social cultures in school through systemic change (Horner, 2016). PBIS utilized a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) which transitions schools from reactionary discipline-focused to proactive instructional approaches with students (Petrasek et al., 2021). The implementation of a PBIS framework can have broad positive effects for students and staff, including improved organizational health and staff affiliation (Bradshaw et al., 2008), enhanced staff professional trust and respect (Houchens et al., 2017), increased time for teaching and leadership (Muscott et al., 2008), an improvement in school attendance for students (Freeman at al., 2015), and reduced suspensions and discipline referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Ultimately, a PBIS framework with definitive systematic motivational components provides an opportunity to construct a positive climate in school that promotes all aspects of student success while supporting a positive climate (Petrasek et al., 2021).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice was first introduced in the criminal justice system for juveniles and adults, but today it is used for a series of civil matters that include but are not limited to family welfare and child protection and disputes in school settings (Daly, 2002). The National Centre for Restorative Approaches in Youth Settings defined restorative justice as:

> …an innovative approach to offending and inappropriate behavior which puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment. A restorative approach in a school shifts the emphasis from managing behavior to focusing on the building, nurturing and repairing of relationships. (Hopkins, 2003, p. 3)

This definition does not include all aspects of restorative justice programs that are currently used in schools, such as student conflict resolution programs, school youth court, and other student-centered restorative programs (Fronius et al., 2016). Some of the many reasons why school systems are embracing restorative justice practices and curriculum include the following:

- Zero-tolerance policies have led to larger numbers of youths being "pushed out" (suspended or expelled) with no evidence of positive impact on school safety (Losen, 2014).
- More school misbehavior is being handed over to the police (particularly with programs that have police in schools, such as SROs), leading to more youth getting involved with official legal systems—thus contributing to a trend toward a "school-to-prison pipeline" (Petrosino et al., 2012).
- There is racial/ethnic disparity in which youths receive school punishments and how severe their punishments are, even when controlling for the type of offense (Skiba et al., 2002).

- Research strongly links suspension and other school discipline to failure to graduate (Losen, 2014).

While there are many reasons to include restorative justice programs in school communities to support school communities with disciplinary matters and decisions, there are also false representations of restorative justice programs that school leaders must note. Daly (2002) shared four of the many common myths regarding restorative justice:

1. Restorative justice is the opposite of retributive justice.
2. Restorative justice uses indigenous justice practices and was the dominant form of premodern justice.
3. Restorative justice is a 'care' (or feminine) response to crime in comparison to a 'justice' (or masculine) response.
4. Restorative justice can be expected to produce major changes in people.

While these myths have contributed to one's understanding of what restorative justice is not, there is still a need to further examine the foundation of why restorative justice has become more widespread and helped recalibrate the focus to also include the victim (Daniels, 2013). Christie's (1977) seminal text *Conflicts as Property* identified the roles that all parties play in the drama of criminal justice and how, for the most part, the victim is left out of the pursuit of justice. Christie highlighted the notion of the victim becoming a 'double loser,' in the sense that the victim is almost entirely removed from his or her pursuit of justice in their own case. Restorative justice has moved toward the acceptance of what can be described as the 'personalization' of justice, unlike ever imagined (Easton, 2012). Both parties are now being brought together to share how the incidents have affected them and shaped their values as a result (Daniels, 2013). There is great power in the victim now being able to speak and have the offenders listen to the impact

they have had on them. It has also served as a powerful tool for the self-empowerment of the victims during this process (Daniels, 2013).

According to Daniels (2013), restorative justice programs became steadfast in the 1990s in the United Kingdom. The notion of restorative justice programs then became steadfast in education settings, with less of a negative association with police enforcement. There is something to be said about restorative practices in schools with students; the opportunity to repair the harm that is done to individuals above the need to assign blame and the delivery of punishment is paramount (Wright, 1993). With the focus on repairing harm and bridging both parties together, there is room for community building and maintaining said community in school (Daniels, 2013). According to Ted Wachtel (2013), President and Founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), restorative practices are defined as "a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making" (p. 1).

One must keep the focus on the 'relationship' aspect of the process and the repair of it when it has been harmed (Daniels, 2013). It is important to remember the ideas that tie restorative justice and practice together as shared by Zehr (1990):

> Crime is a violation of people and relationships. It creates obligations to make things right. Justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance. (p. 118)

In 1985, Zehr, identified two differing paradigms, one for retributive justice and the other for restorative justice. Here, Zehr stated that in retributive justice, crime is a violation of the law and the State; in restorative justice, the crime has been committed to the people and the community. Hence, the focus on the restoration of the community in order to restore both parties involved and then move forward to strengthen said community (Daniels, 2013). Schools across the nation

have now transitioned to the use of restorative justice programs as a way of reducing and managing school suspensions, truancy, bullying, disciplinary issues, and other conflicts (Karo & Breslin, 2001; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Restorative justice programs can take many forms, such as conferencing, circles, and meditation, that focus on dialogue that aims to repair harm and the relationships affected by said harm (Johnstone, 2002; Macready, 2009; Suvall, 2009; Zehr, 2002). Schools are also turning to restorative practices to create safe classroom environments that can alleviate and, at times, prevent traumatic experiences in schools, which correlates with student readiness for learning (Kehoe et al., 2018; National Middle Association [NMSA], 2010; Smith et al., 2018). Circles are one powerful way to address children's social and emotional needs; they can enhance self-esteem and encourage positive relationships through the sharing out of thoughts and feelings (Mosley, 1996). The notion of belonging and being part of a community is paramount for students, particularly in the middle school ages; Schwartz et al. (2016) explained this in what they identified as their top dog/bottom dog (TDBD) phenomenon. For many years, more and more schools have adopted a restorative justice curriculum in their class schedules in an effort to manage and reduce disciplinary incidents. Circles at schools afford students the opportunity to create a safe holding space to express how they were feeling, what they were upset about, community norms, community expectations, and anything that may have occurred that was affecting a few or many members of the class collective (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 328; Silverman & Mee, 2018, p. 2).

One of the noted challenges of restorative work is consistency in practice and delivery of restorative justice programs (Daniels, 2013). Hopkins (2004) described a restorative pyramid in which he identified a firm foundation of an ethos and values that build on qualities like empathy, trust, and respect, as well as the importance of human feelings, needs, and rights. The next level of

the pyramid is the development of skills, while the level after that is the processes before the tip of the pyramid (Hopkins, 2004). Any inconsistency will directly impact the scope of the work when it comes to restorative justice. Despite noted challenges, there are valid reasons to introduce school communities to restorative justice programs. Restorative justice programs seek to do away with punitive approaches to school discipline and incorporate more humane approaches that include all members of the school community, including both participants in an incident. School staff and personnel that implement this approach utilize core strategies, which include conferencing circles, in an effort to resolve conflict and engage students in managing the environment (Schiff & Bazemore, 2012, p. 74). Most recently, over the last few years, the United States has witnessed violent multiple attacks on people of color (combined with the Coronavirus pandemic) now more than ever; it is critical to incorporate a component of restorative approaches in schooling for young people. The ongoing crises of long-standing structural inequities have contributed to a collective and individual trauma that has many serious implications for the mental health, wellness, and learning opportunities for youth across this country (DePaoli et al., 2021).

Another consideration in restorative practices and approaches to take into account is that of student voice. With the varying opportunities for student discussion and dialogue in restorative practices such as conferencing, circles, and meditation (Johnstone, 2002; Macready, 2009; Suvall, 2009; Zehr, 2002), there are multiple entry points that school leaders can identify to incorporate student voice. Such dialogue with students can also serve as an opportunity to discuss their feelings about school discipline, rules and regulations, not only the topics and items shared out during circles, conferencing and after an incident.

The inclusion of restorative approaches in schools as young people return to school buildings after the COVID-19 pandemic will be essential components in learning environments.

School redesign must include restorative spaces—environments where adolescents are known, nurtured, and healed—as an important way that school communities can embody more equitable approaches to meet students' immediate and long-term needs (DePaoli et al., 2021). In a Learning Policy Institute Research Brief, DePaoli et al. (2021) explained that restorative approaches are a central dimension of the whole child approach to teaching and learning, which aims at recognizing the unique strengths, needs, and interests of students. Restorative approaches support students' academic, cognitive, and social-emotional growth, the promotion of their individual selves, and their physical and mental health well-being (DePaoli et al., 2021). One example of a restorative structure that can support students in school is advisory systems which can support community building and relationships as well as provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to check in on students' academic and social-emotional needs (DePaoli et al., 2021). The foundation of restorative approaches to education includes safe, supportive learning environments where students feel a sense of belonging and relational trust (DePaoli et al., 2021).

School Discipline in New York

School disciplinary practices and measures utilized within the state of New York have come under scrutiny in recent years. Schools across New York City also show trends and patterns in the use of out-of-school suspensions similar to those across other parts of the country (Ayoub et al., 2019). In 2011, the total number of school suspensions peaked at 73,441 before a widely documented decline that continues today (Ayoub, 2013; Veiga, 2017). The New York Equity Coalition (2018) explored New York school districts' discipline to highlight the disproportionality between Black students and their peers. New York State faces large racial disparities in how school districts in the state impose out-of-school suspensions (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Figure 5 illustrates the percent of students outside of New York City

with at least one out-of-school suspension by student race. Schools outside of New York City are 4.2 times more likely to suspend Black students than White students.

Figure 5. *Percent of Students Outside of New York City with at Least One Out-of-school Suspension*

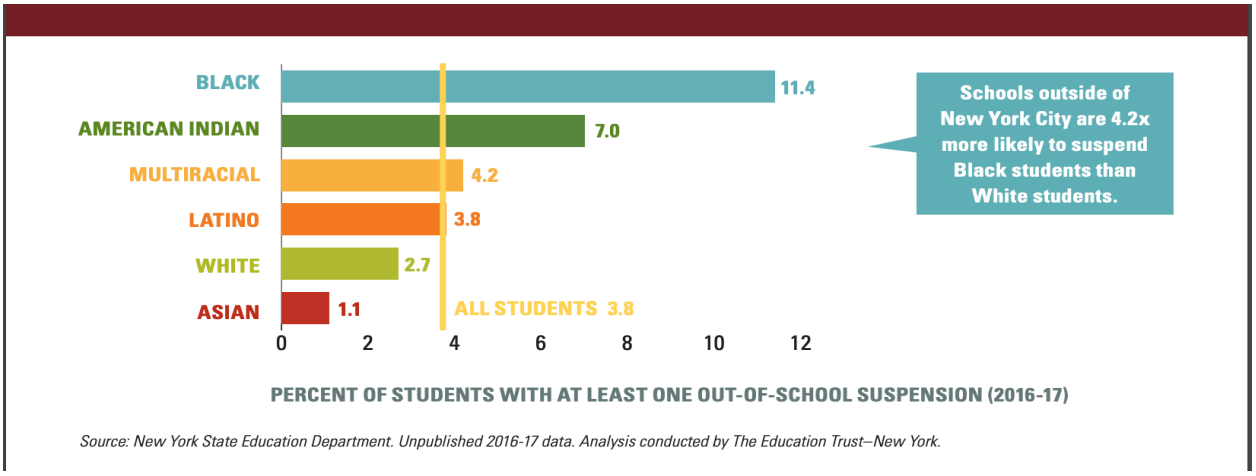
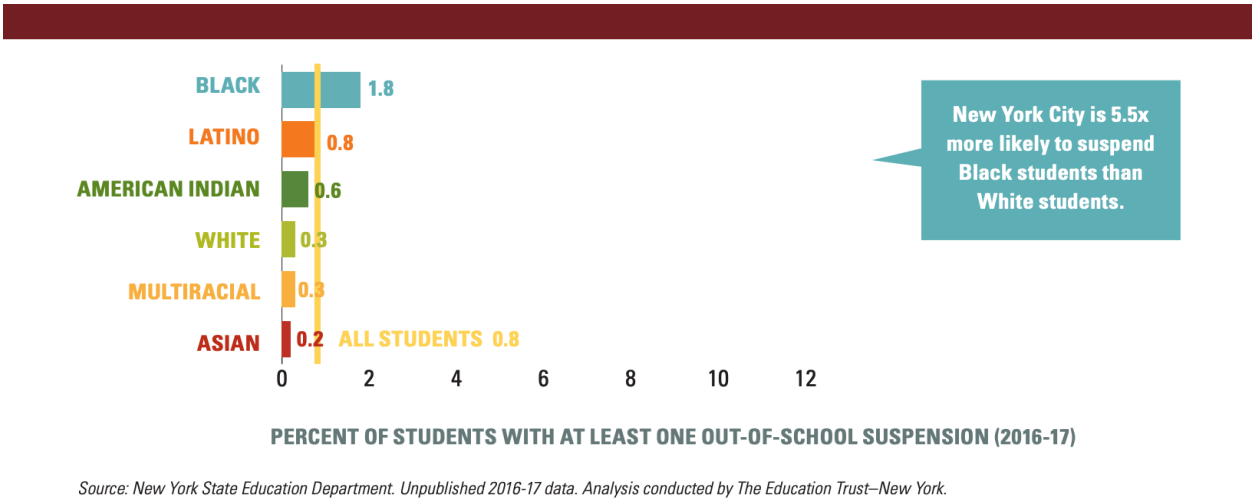


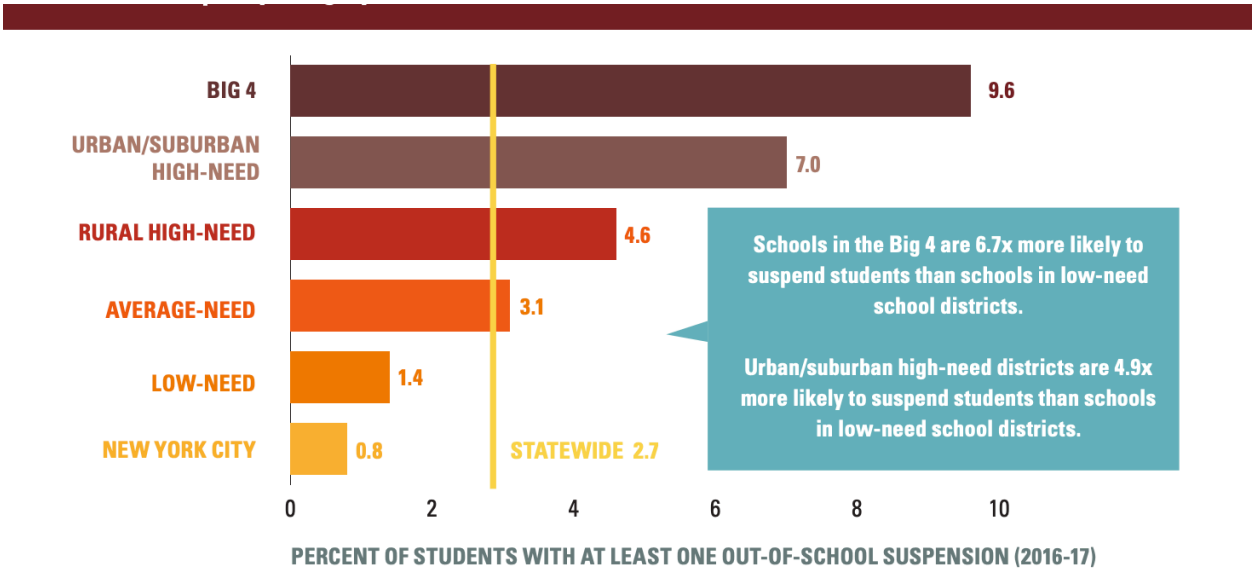
Figure 6 illustrates the percent of students in New York City with at least one out-of-school suspension by student race. Schools in New York City are 5.5 times more likely to suspend Black students than White students.

Figure 6. *Percent of Students in New York City with at Least One Out-of-school Suspension*



New York State suspended the equivalent of at least one student every minute during the 2016-2017 school year (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Location in New York State is a contributing factor to the imposition of out-of-school suspensions (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). The Big 4 school districts—which include Buffalo Public Schools, Rochester City School District, Syracuse City School District, and Yonkers Public Schools—were almost seven times as likely to suspend students in schools in low-need school districts (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Additionally, schools in urban/suburban high-need districts were almost five times as likely to suspend students as schools in low-need school districts (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Finally, New York City schools imposed out-of-school suspensions at a lower rate than all other classifications of school districts in the state of New York (New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Figure 7 illustrates this data set.

Figure 7. *Percent of Students with at Least One Out-of-school Suspension by School District*



Source: New York State Education Department. Unpublished 2016-17 data. Analysis conducted by The Education Trust–New York.

The high crime rates during the 1990s, along with the rise in school shootings, resulted in Zero Tolerance Policies across the country (Ayoub et al., 2019). New York City was not excluded from the use of these strict policies in schools (Ayoub et al., 2019). As the home of the largest school district in the nation, New York City has over one million students enrolled in its public schools across 1,800 schools; more than half are shared with other public schools, charter schools, or nonprofit organizations (Ayoub et al., 2019). The NYCDOE works with the New York Police Department (NYPD) and has the largest school safety agent force in the country, over 5,000 agents, who serve as unarmed civilian employees of the NYPD, not the DOE (Ayoub et al., 2019). In addition, 200 police officers across New York City are assigned to schools to assist with post-incident surveillance and monitoring, random metal detector scanning, and other safety-related responsibilities (Ayoub et al., 2019). The state of New York has visible disproportionality among Black students and their White peers, as illustrated in the data sets above. In 2014, President Obama shared guidelines that would allow the USDOE could fine schools in violation of civil rights law for discriminatory disciplinary policies or disproportional discipline rates (New York Equity Coalition, 2018).

Relative Risk Ratio

The NYCDOE Cohort 1 of the Office of Equity and Access (OEA) Principals Training sessions began over the summer of 2018. The principals were exposed to a variety of data sets to examine, one of which was the relative risk ratio of schools' suspension data. Relative risk ratio can be understood as the following formula (x subgroup divided by x enrollment) divided by [(total discipline minus x subgroup discipline) divided by (total enrollment minus x subgroup enrollment) (see Figure 8). The training and overview received by principals in Cohort 1 in the NYCDOE Equity Initiative was presented by Dr. Edward Fergus (2018).

Figure 8. *Relative Risk Ratio (RRR) Formula*

$$\frac{(X \text{ subgroup Discipline} / X \text{ subgroup Enrollment})}{[(\text{Total Discipline} - X \text{ Subgroup Discipline}) / (\text{Total Enrollment} - X \text{ Subgroup Enrollment})]}$$

Note. Retrieved from Cichy Learning Group website: http://www.cichylearning.com/2015/08/disproportionate-representation-special-education-oregon-2014-2015/

Relative Risk Ratio can best be explained by thinking of the ratio as how often something happens to one group compared to the other groups in the same community. Hence, the name Relative Risk identifies how much one subgroup is at risk of something compared to another subgroup. One example that can illustrate RRR is how often students are suspended by subgroups (African American, Latino) within a Community School District in New York City. I use the following illustration as an example: If a student who wears blue shirts to school is suspended just as often as students who wear red and yellow shirts to school, then all of the students in that school have the same RRR. That RRR, since it is equal for all students regardless of shirt color, is equal to 1.0. However, if students who wear blue shirts to school are suspended twice as often as students who wear yellow shirts, then students who wear blue shirts have an RRR of 2.0; that is, students who wear blue shirts to school run twice as much of a risk of getting suspended in school. Therefore, the blue shirt students have an RRR of 2.0. If students who wear red shirts are suspended half as many times as students who wear yellow shirts to school, then they have an RRR of .5 when compared to those with yellow shirts. The number of students who wear each color shirt does not matter when calculating RRR because one is calculating the (risk)

chances of how many times one color shirt will get suspended compared to another color shirt, not the total number of all color shirts.

Relative Risk Ratio would allow a school leader to see how many more times a Black student is being suspended than a White student during one academic school year. Normally, school leaders only receive reports of where and how often school incidents are taking place as well as who is involved. But Relative Risk Ratios afford school leaders to see how many more times a Black student is suspended for the same incident or infraction than a White student. Figure 9 illustrates the number sets needed in order to calculate the RRR for student suspension rates in their schools. To calculate the RRR, one must have the following data sets available: School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Number of Students Receiving Discipline by Race/Ethnicity. I created an example of how RRR is calculated in Figure 9 below (Mota, 2019).

Figure 9. *Example of Relative Risk Ratio (RRR) Calculations*

$$\frac{\text{(Black Discipline /Black Enrollment)}}{\text{[(Total Discipline – Black Discipline) / (Total Enrollment – Black Enrollment)]}}$$

(8/37) / [(47 – 8) / (418 – 37)] =

.216 / (39 / 381) = .216 / .102 =

2.11 Relative Risk Ratio

African American subgroup calculation

African American Discipline = 8, African American Enrollment = 37

Total Discipline = 47, Total Enrollment = 418

The example I generated above outlines the data sets for African American students enrolled in the Mota School that I use for purposes of illustrating how to calculate RRR in my study. With the following data sets, African American students were disciplined 8 times and had a total enrollment of 37. Total discipline for the Mota School is 418. The following RRR was

calculated for African American students: 2.11. An RRR of 2.11 means that African American students are twice as likely to get suspended than the other students in the Mota School. RRR calculations can help a school leader see very clearly if there are equitable suspension rates in their school. Through analysis and investigation, school leaders can identify the practices and protocols that exist within their schools to identify how equitable said practices and protocols are. To create a more equitable school regarding school discipline, school leaders can use resources and guidelines to help them create equitable practices and protocols in their buildings.

New York City Department of Education Discipline Reform

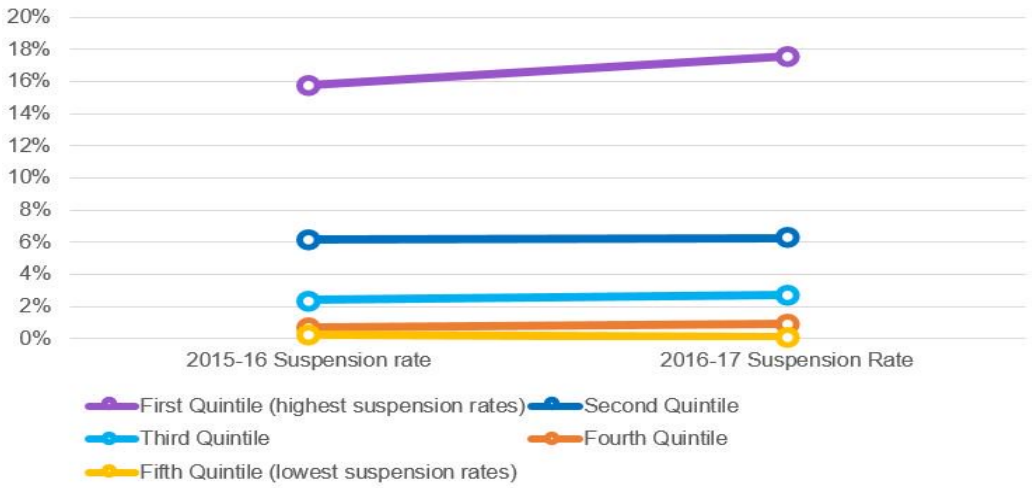
While there has been a decline in crime rates overall as a result of intentional efforts by the NYPD School Safety Division and the DOE, school-based arrests declined to an all-time low during the 2017-2018 academic school year (Mayor's Management Report, 2018). In 2015, the New York City Mayor's Office announced a series of policies, practices, and resources that focused on addressing the disparities in discipline and academic achievement (Ayoub et al., 2019). The city announced restrictions on the use of suspensions, limitations on handcuffing, and new training for school safety agents in public schools (Decker &Snyder, 2015). Several revisions to the discipline code in NYC public schools have made it harder to suspend students in Grades K-2 (Ayoub et al., 2019). There has also been an expanded use of restorative practices and additional resources for mental health support by the DOE (Ayoub et al., 2019).

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the NYCDOE rolled out Cohort 1 of the Equity Initiative under the Office of Equity and Access (OEA), with a total of 17 school districts comprised of community school districts, high school districts, and a combination of other districts, including alternative and affinity schools. Training for principals in Cohort 1 began in July during the summer. The OEA collaborated with Dr. Eddie Fergus, a professor from Temple

University, who has focused on equity in schools for several years in academia. To fully understand the problem that exists in schools today of inequity and urban youth, it is necessary to understand how urban, African American, and Latino youth are portrayed, compared to their actual portrait. “The careful and strategic construction of Black males as jesters, clowns, entertainers, sex-crazed brutes, violent hustlers, law-breaking thugs was centuries in the making” (Howard et al., 2012, p. 98). Additionally, Brown (2011) discovered that the same destructive narrative about Black men had been recycled in social science and educational research since the 1930s (Harper & Williams, 2014). Despite the vast diversity between them, Latino men are routinely imagined, researched, and misrepresented in ways that are dehumanized and monolithic (Noguera & Hurtado, 2012).

Figure 10 illustrates the suspension rates of students in New York City schools by quartiles between 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 (NYCDOE Suspension Reports 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, pursuant to LL93). The data illustrated in Figure 10 are from 1,618 New York City schools. In large urban school districts like New York City, suspensions have a disproportional impact on Black and Latino students (NYCDOE Suspension Reports 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, pursuant to LL93). Black students are suspended approximately more than three times the rate of White students. In the 2016-2017 academic school year, Black students made up 26% of the student population, but received 47% of all suspensions and 525 of all suspensions that were longer than 5 days (NYCDOE Suspension Reports 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, pursuant to LL93). While Black and Latino students made up 67% of the student population, they made up 88% of student suspensions during the 2016-017 academic school year (NYCDOE Suspension Reports 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, pursuant to LL93).

Figure 10. *Average Suspension Rates by Quintiles Year-over-year Comparison*



The City of New York is a unique school system with student enrollment from many different backgrounds; over 40% of students speak a language other than English at home while 14% are English language learners (Ayoub et al., 2019). Almost 75% of students are considered economically disadvantaged, and the majority of the population is predominantly children of color, with 41% Hispanic and 26% Black students, while 15% are White students (NYC Department of Education, 2018). These demographic percentages are different than New York City overall, which is 45% White, 29% Hispanic, and 24% Black (Census, 2017). Additionally, New York City has a higher percentage of students with disabilities (i.e., emotional, learning, behavioral, and physical) at 19%, compared to the national percentage of 13% (NCES, 2018). Back in 2012, New York City was identified as the third most segregated school system after Chicago and Dallas (Fessenden, 2012). More recent data now have New York City as the most segregated school district in the nation (Chokski, 2014; Toure, 2018).

Culturally Relevant Leadership

Over 20 years ago, culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 1994) became part of the education reform world. The goal was aimed at identifying ways classroom teachers could address the unique learning needs of

students of color in their classrooms. Some examples of this work included using cultural referents in pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as well as classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2004). The bridge through which culturally relevant pedagogy was put to action was with culturally responsive school leadership.

This work could not alone live in the classrooms, but was also mainstreamed into the school culture and community overall, and it was necessary for school administration to carry this out as a whole (Gay, 1994). As Khalifa (2016) noted, the work must also be ingrained in training and developing school leaders' ability to promote and sustain stable school environments where teachers can flourish in this work. A poignant focus must be made on extending the scope of this work to additional aspects of the educational arena. Educational reform of any kind should include school administration and leaders, and subsequently teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004); school leaders are a crucial component in culturally relevant education reform. The development of effective leaders consequently becomes a crucial part of the recruitment process for children who have been marginalized over the years (Khalifa et al., 2016). Such school leader development and training will create insight into and understanding of the need to recruit and sustain culturally responsive pedagogues who are more prepared to work with students of color who live in poverty, thus reducing the likelihood that those students will receive teachers who are less qualified and work out their content area (Clotfelter, Ladd et al., 2006; Lankford et al., 2002; Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

There has been emerging literature on the work of principals and culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) as it relates to this work (Khalifa et al, 2016). Culturally responsive leaders serve at various levels and contexts, from district-level (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) to community-level leaders (Khalifa, 2012), to teacher-leaders (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and

everything in between. Leadership research has suggested that principals can have a significant impact on instruction and classroom learning (Branch et al., 2013). According to Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), of all leadership expressions, the principal is the most knowledgeable about resources and is best positioned to support reforms on a school-wide level.

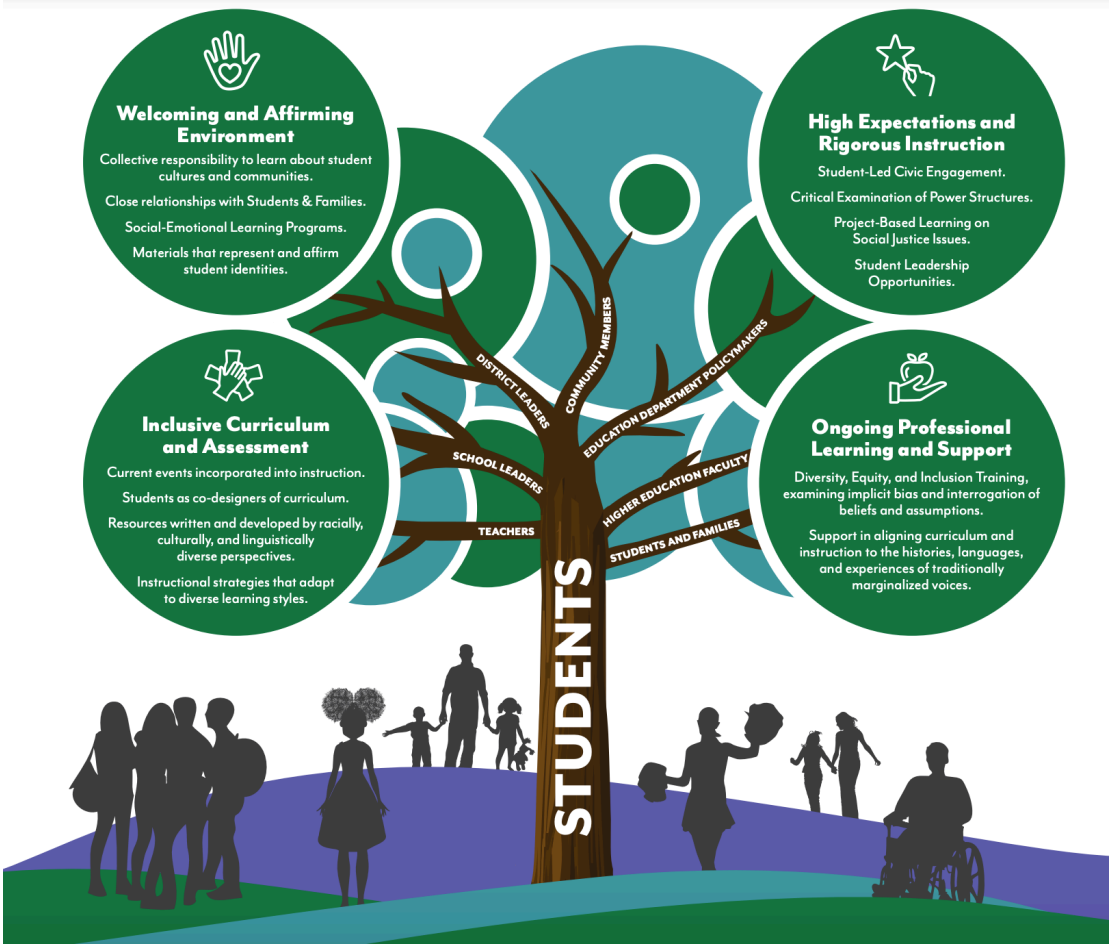
New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework

In 2018, the New York State Board of Regents set out to revamp culturally relevant and responsive education by creating an opportunity to collaborate with experts to create a culturally responsive-sustaining education framework. In collaboration with the New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools and Director Dr. Kirkland, a robust document that would serve as the foundation for this framework was created. The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework helps educators create student-centered learning environments that affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning; develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change (New York State Department of Education Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, 2019).

The Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education /Framework is grounded in four principles: Welcoming and Affirming Environment, High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction, Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment, and Ongoing Professional Learning (New York State Department of Education Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework, 2019). The guidelines for culturally responsive-sustaining education in New York State were grounded in a vision of a system that creates students who experience academic success; are sociopolitically conscious and socioculturally responsive; and have a critical lens through which they challenge inequitable

systems of access, power, and privilege—all of which are grounded in Ladson-Billings' (1995) early work on culturally relevant teaching. The CRSE Framework (2019) identifies a Welcoming and Affirming Environment as one that is safe and where people can find themselves represented and reflected, and where it is understood that all people are treated with respect and dignity. Additionally, the environment ensures that all cultural identities are affirmed, valued, and used as vehicles for teaching and learning. High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction is identified as a way to prepare the community for rigor and independent learning (New York State Department of Education Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework, 2019). The Framework identifies the school environment as academically rigorous and challenging, while it also considers the different ways students learn. Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment is utilized to elevate historically marginalized voices, includes the opportunity to learn about power and privilege in the context of varying communities, and provides opportunities to empower students to become agents of positive social change (New York State Department of Education Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework, 2019). The last principle in the CRSE Framework (2019) is Ongoing Professional Learning, which is founded on the notion that teaching and learning are adaptive processes that require constant reexamination (Gay, 2010; Moll et al., 1992). This allows learners to build a critically conscious lens toward instruction, curriculum, assessment, history culture, and institutions (New York State Department of Education Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework, 2019) (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. *The New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework*



The CRSE framework was created to help educators place student-centered learning at the center of school environments that affirm racial, linguistic, and cultural identities. Participants in my study shared components of their leadership practices that highlighted how they prepared students for rigor and independent learning in their school communities. As leaders of diverse schools in urban school districts, participants voiced the need to set high expectations for all students, in both academics and behavior alike. School leaders shared the need to ensure there were high-level teaching and instruction in classrooms across all classrooms, regardless of background or classification. Participants also voiced the ways they created welcoming school environments that celebrated diversity and embraced a connection and sense of belonging for all students. Participants additionally highlighted the need to empower

students in order to increase self-esteem and worth. Principal visibility and presence in the participants' school communities allowed for the creation of relationships and connections between school leader and students, which fosters a positive climate and the opportunity to empower students for social change.

Focus on Racial Equity

The most recent data have indicated that among the 100 largest school districts in the United States, Latino and African American students account for almost 70% of total student enrollment; among the 500 largest school districts, the figure is 60% (Dixson, 2014; Sable & Young, 2003). Furthermore, the NCES (USDOE & NCES, 2014) reported that 25.8% of U.S. public PreK-12 students were Latino youth during the 2014-2015 school year; additionally, Latino youth were predicted to comprise 30% of all students in the 2019-2020 school year. There has also been a significant shift in the White student population—an expected drop will occur in the White student population over the next several decades, from being the largest student group today to being as low as 35% of the total student population by the year 2026 (USDOE, 2014). Such dramatic changes in school enrollment demographics require school districts across the nation to reexamine practices and policies to ensure that all learners are adequately represented in all aspects of the school community (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Urban schools have been faced with the greatest challenge, that of educating and preparing urban students who often face many obstacles in and out of the school community. Poverty, crime, and other contributing factors facing many urban communities hinder and even prevent students in urban classrooms from meeting grade learning standards (Delpit, 2012). A historic struggle between the concepts of excellence and equality has pervaded the politics of American education since its inception and persist today (Gittell, 1998). Leonardo and Grubb

(2014) argued that racism in schools is a condition that many students of color experience. They identified racism as an institutional relationship of power. Another concept, colorism, is the idea that darker people who exist in a racial group experience more skin-tone discrimination, thereby lowering their chances for success in many areas, including education (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014). Leonardo and Grubb added that race also differs from ethnicity, which is associated with culture. In contrast, race is constructed as a social system based on physical markers, primarily skin color. Over time, scholars have noted a shift taking place from biological racism, or the notion that groups retain immutable or genetic traits such as intelligence, whereby Whites are judged to be more intelligent than the other races, regardless of whether they value education (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014).

To address inequity in schools around the country, much reform is needed around the perennial achievement gap between Latinos and Blacks and Asian Americans and Whites. Racial minorities who function within a larger section of society determined by the color line are becoming more challenging to assert in public life (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014). In education, while many efforts have addressed and attempted to dismantle the achievement gap, Blacks and Latinos continue to be on the receiving end of this disparity, while Whites and Asians receive the benefits (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014).

Another challenge that can affect students of color is low expectations, which can have a detrimental effect on their academic ability and standing in schools. The notion of deficit mindset is often illustrated in many school communities with a large number of African American and Latino students. Deficit perceptions of poor, working-class families contend that they lack the opposite White middle-class orientation critical for success in educational institutions (Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2002). As students and families alike may strive

to make their way through a school system and community that do not foster welcoming and caring environments, there is room for dis-attachment and growing apathy from families of color. The relationships that people make are primarily with other people, but relationships can also be with institutions (Gonzalez, 2005), which can mediate thinking in powerful ways. As culture pertains to learning, Wells (1995) suggested, "What we learn depends crucially on the company we keep, on what activities in which we engage together, and how we do and talk about these activities" (p. 238).

Need for Culturally Relevant Leadership

When examining the need for culturally responsive schools, it is important to note that most principals and teachers of diverse students do not share the same cultural backgrounds (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). This disconnect lays the foundation for the need for culturally responsive school leadership. A Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework can serve as the foundation for leadership training and preparation to address issues of diversity in urban schools in particular. CRSL behaviors, as highlighted by Khalifa (2016), include practices, mannerisms, policies, discourses, and actions that have a direct impact on school clime, school structure, and student outcomes. By focusing on behaviors that can impact the outcome of students, in particular student of color, concrete steps can be enacted to support students of color in schools to succeed. Studies have noted that principals can influence the professional development and instruction of teachers and most student learning (J.B. Anderson, 2008; Branch et al., 2013; Drago-Severson, 2012; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Griffith, 1999). Another aspect of school leadership that is more poignant when it comes to changing the entire make-up of schools is that of transformational leadership, those leaders who have created an environment with strong relationships of trust, vision, a sense of community, and goals (Giles et

al., 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). I would note the strong relationships of trust as being key when it comes to changing exclusionary discipline practices in urban schools that have directly resulted in the school-to-prison pipeline, leaving many students of color unable to trust school leadership and staff.

For over 50 years, educational research has focused on closing the racial achievement gap in this country (Khalifa, 2016). The cost of closing this gap has been the driving force behind legislative reforms and has exceeded hundreds of billions of dollars in tax dollars (Payne, 2008). In 1998, Hallinger and Leithwood identified culture as a major component in shaping the thinking, practices, and behaviors of students, staff, parents, and other school stakeholders alike. However, there continues to be research suggesting that students of color who were historically oppressed continue to be so today (Khalifa, 2016). In their 2010 study, Young, Madsen, and Young indicated that principals were not prepared to lead their diverse schools, unable to implement policy that would address the diversity issues, and could not even hold meaningful conversations about diversity. One potential reason for this lack of preparation when it comes to diversity is that most leadership reform foci are on instructional, transformational, and transactional leadership models (Khalifa, 2016). Most, if not all, of these leadership models do not explicitly address the culture and cultural needs of students. There is a tremendous need for CRSL in order to address the increasing diversity in schools and (oftentimes) the disconnect students experience in schools when staff members do not look like them.

Changes in leadership preparation programs are one component of the necessary changes in this work. Leaders must also be self-aware of their role as school environment and culture creator and facilitator of learning opportunities for school community members to help students of diverse backgrounds succeed (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). School leaders' awareness

must also include their goal to become responsive to all cultural school groups in light of their misunderstandings of other cultures (Gordon & Ronder, 2016). Along with this self-awareness, there must also be a level of geographic and cultural awareness and setting of the school (Khalifa, 2016). As a result of varying circumstances across school communities, a singular leadership practice would be to the detriment of the school community as a whole, in particular the common Western leadership practices (Hofstede, 1991; Khalifa et al., 2014). Many Black and Latino school leaders use their own experiences and reflections to guide their leadership style in order to disrupt oppressive practices in their current school environments (Harris, 1999; Rael, 2002). Two additional contributions of CRSL have been identified in the literature: maintaining high expectations for students (J.E. Davis, 2003; Irvine, 1990; Walker, 2009) and the primary role of advocacy to increase trust and student learning between the principal and all members of the school community (Aleman, 2009, G. L. Anderson, 2009; Khalifa, 2011, 2012, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Developing school leaders' cultural preparedness and understanding of diverse student cultures will also impact the way school leaders understand student behavior through a cultural lens. School leaders' ability to conceptualize school disciplinary practices will include student beliefs and values as identified in their own cultures, not restricted to the values and beliefs of the school leader alone.

Table 2 illustrates Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Behaviors of Culturally Responsive School Leaders, which identifies the four behaviors that culturally responsive school leaders exercise in their leadership practice.

Table 2. *Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Behaviors of Culturally Responsive School Leaders*

Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors	Develops culturally responsive teachers	Promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment	Engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts
Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006) Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004) Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools (Ishimaru, 2013; Smyth, 2006 Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) Using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice (Skrla et al., 2004) Leading with courage (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1988) Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010)	Developing teacher capacities for cultural responsive pedagogy (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003) Collaborative walkthroughs (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Creating culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, et al., 2003) Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services (Skrla et al., 2004). Creating a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) Engaging/reforming the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) Modeling culturally responsive teaching (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Using culturally responsive assessment tools for students (Hopson, 2001; Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Braton, 2003)	Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010) Building relationships; reducing anxiety among students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Modeling CRSL for staff in building interactions (Khalifa, 2011; Tillman, 2005) Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007) If need be, challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Acknowledges, values, and uses Indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2010, 2012) Uses student voice (Antrop-González, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Using school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends (Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharris, 2007)	Developing meaningful, positive relationships with community (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001) Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and other roles (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006) Finding overlapping spaces for school and community (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012) Serving as advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012) Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2002; Flessa, 2009) Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information (Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Connecting directly with students (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)

The way school leaders identify with their students is key. The cultural and social make-up of today's schools requires special attention to the educational philosophies of school leaders (Brooks & Miles, 2010; Dancy & Horsford, 2010; Dantly & Tillman, 2006; Horsford, 2009; Marshall & Olia, 2006; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Skrla et al., 2008; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tillman, 2002). According to Schein (1992), culture in educational leadership pertains to how school leaders "create and manage culture" (p. 5) along with the way they understand and work with it. As the number of diverse students in this country continue to increase, there is an even greater need for culturally relevant, competent, and responsive leadership visible in schools (Horsford et al., 2011). Culturally relevant leadership in schools across the United States will

continue to be needed as a result of the projected demographic changes by 2050; the White population is expected to increase by 7%, while the Hispanic population by 188%, Asians by 213%, and Blacks by 71% (Young & Brooks, 2008). These changes can be attributed to demographic trends in suburbanization, immigration, migration, resegregation, the number of White students included in the school-age population, and the increasing number of students of color (Clotfelter et al., 2005; Horsford, 2010; Orfield, 2009).

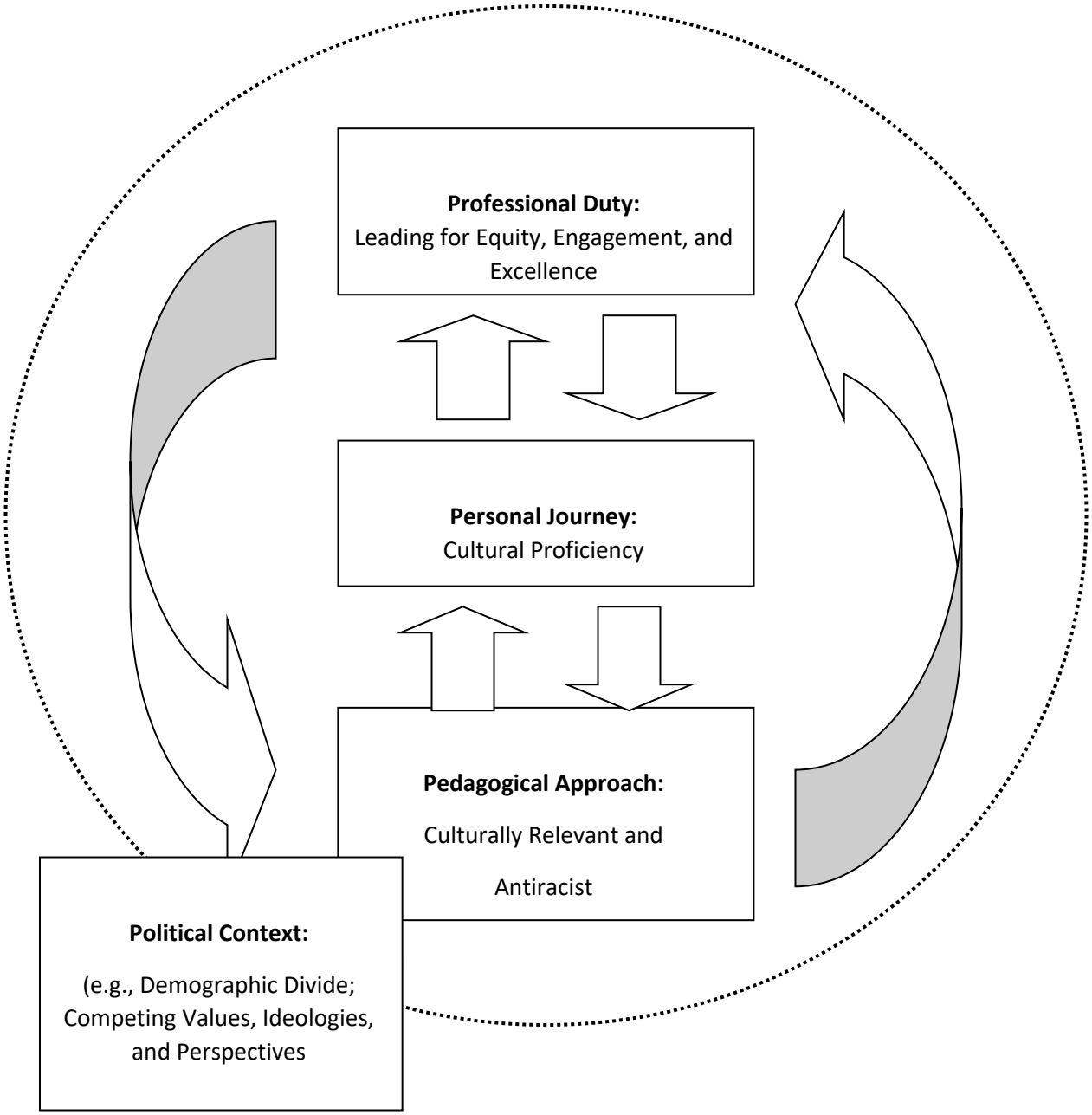
Another noticeable impact in schools regarding demographics is of teachers in the classrooms. While demographics are expected to vary drastically for students in the next two decades, not much is changing when it comes to teachers. The percentage of non-White full-time teachers increased from 13% to 17% between 1993-1994 and 2003-2004, but teacher make-up still remains largely White (83.3%) and female (74.8%) in 2003-2004 (NCES, 2007). These trends and patterns are also visible across school leader demographics in this country. In the 2003-2004 school year, only 9.3% were Black, 4.8% were Hispanic, and less than 1% were Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian; the overwhelming majority was White at 84.2% (NCES, 2007). For over 50 years, education research has developed the concept of diversity from multicultural education to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000), and antiracist pedagogy and education (Cochran-Smith, 1995; (Horsford et al., 2011). All of these pieces of research have been viewed under the larger scope of the work of transformational leadership as well as leadership for social justice (Cooper, 2009; Dantley et al., 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2009).

School leaders who are able to lead school communities that are culturally diverse are essential to the future of the field of education (Horsford et al., 2011). Horsford et al.'s (2011) framework for culturally relevant leadership creates a foundation that identifies four dimensions

to prepare school leaders to succeed in diverse school settings: the political context, a pedagogical approach, personal journey, and professional duty. This framework aligns political context to the demographic divide, which includes competing ideologies, values and perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist pedagogy as part of the pedagogical approach; a school leader's cultural proficiency is aligned with their personal journey, and their ability to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence is part of their professional duty (Horsford et al., 2011). The navigation of school leadership practices that embrace culture in classrooms, foster learning environments, and utilize diversity to increase student achievement through cultural affirmations and social support is key (Horsford, 2010; Morris, 2008).

Figure 12 illustrates Horsford et al.'s (2011) Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership, which identifies the four dimensions discussed above that prepare school leaders to succeed in diverse school settings: the political context, a pedagogical approach, personal journey, and professional duty.

Figure 12. *Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn's (2011) Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership*



Summary

Culturally relevant and responsive leadership are key components of leadership practices that lead to school reform and social justice. While culturally responsive teaching is valuable (Gay, 2010), it alone cannot solve the major problem that many minoritized students face. School leadership is a key element to education reform, second only to teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004), in order to retain good teachers who may eventually leave schools with ineffective leaders. The need to develop effective school leaders is a vital part of the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers for children who have been marginalized (Khalifa et al., 2016). Effective school leaders must have the capability of promoting and sustaining a school environment that is stable enough to support and develop good teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016). This is critically important for school leaders in diverse and low socioeconomic school communities where poor children of color will most likely be taught by inexperienced teachers who are often out of their teaching license (Clotfelter, Ladd et al., 2006; Lankford et al., 2002; Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Khalifa et al. (2016) explored the notion of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) behaviors, which are identified as the practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourse that influence school climate, structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes. The participants in this study all expanded on the way they interacted with students, communicated expectations to them and their families, and created school-wide policies to support all students in the school community, i.e., guidance counseling, peer mediation, and mentoring. Through their actions, the participants were able to create and sustain school environments that allowed students to learn from their mistakes when they were in trouble and speak to adults in the building who cared about them and guided them toward better decision-making skills. These practices and actions impacted school climate, structure, and

teacher interactions with students, which framed the culturally responsive leadership of the participants in their school buildings. With shifting and changing student demographics, it is critical that leadership practices respond to the needs that accompany these shifts (Khalifa et al., 2016). The participants in this study changed the way students of color were disciplined by conceptualizing school discipline policies in a way that were culturally responsive to students' needs by promoting a climate that made the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016). When identifying supports and systems that respond to the unique learning needs of marginalized students, terms like "culturally responsive," "culturally relevant" and "culturally sustaining pedagogy" (Paris, 2012) have been used for the ongoing changes in needs and demographics in schools. These terms along with "culturally responsive pedagogy" are aimed at bringing to light the need for educators and educational contexts to understand, respond, incorporate, accommodate, and ultimately celebrate the entirety of the students they serve, including their languages and literacies, spiritual universe, cultures, racial proclivities, behaviors, knowledges, critical thought, and appearances (Khalifa et al., 2016). The term *culturally responsive school leadership* (CRSL) has been most consistently employed in educational leadership studies (Johnson, 2006; Merchant et al., 2013; Webb-Johnson, 2006), and the word *responsive* captures the important action-based component of the term that speaks to the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that embrace the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of the students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Principal actions and decisions made by the participants in this study identified various aspects of CRSL that included anti-oppressive/racist leadership (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Kumashiro, 2000), transformative leadership (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Shields, 2010), and social justice leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Theoharis, 2007). As noted by researchers (J. B.

Anderson, 2008; Branch et al., 2013; Drago-Severson, 2012; Eilers & Camach, 2007; Griffith, 1999), principals can influence student learning as well as teacher learning and instruction. The CRSL framework serves to support a school leader's impact on the school community and shift the paradigm to a more welcoming and supportive school culture that meets students' needs. Through the four aspects of culturally responsive leadership—critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula, teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments that engage students and parents in community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016), school leaders will be able to support students in their school community through a cultural lens and focus on learning and success for all.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shared the main bodies of literature that informed my study. The three main bodies of literature covered in this review were: *Urban Education Leadership, School Discipline and Culturally Relevant Leadership.* These helped to ground the theoretical framework that guided the study. The next chapter discusses the methodology I used to carry out my study.

Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to identify how the values and beliefs of self-identified culturally relevant urban school principals informed the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that supported students of color. I explored how those self-identified culturally relevant urban school principals conceptualized school discipline policies in a way that changed the way students of color were disciplined. I listened to participants' stories and experiences throughout their years as school principals in order to capture examples of how their values and beliefs shaped their decision making. I also wanted to learn if those values and beliefs had changed over time. The following questions guided this qualitative interview study:

1. How do urban school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined?
2. How do the values and beliefs of urban school leaders inform their implementation of school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color?

Research Design

Qualitative research is designed to explore a social problem where the researcher serves as the data collection instrument and deconstructs the individual experiences inductively by concentrating on the participants' perspectives and meanings (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I decided to use a qualitative research design for this study because the way in which school leaders in urban schools conceptualize school discipline policies, and use their values and beliefs to implement school discipline policies required additional

examination. According to Glesne (1999), "To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk with participants about their perceptions" (p. 5).

The 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed me to gather the perspectives, narratives, and accounts of culturally relevant school leaders with at least 5 years of experience as urban school principals. Study participants shared insights and learnings from their experiences as school principals; similarly, the expert participants shared their superintendent-level experiences regarding students of color and school discipline policies. Participants' experiences in school leadership ranged from 5 to over 11 years, and the experiences as superintendent district-level leader, state-level leader, consultant, and higher education professor ranged from 10 to over 40 years. Findings included perspectives from former urban school principals, including New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) principals. I was able to collect rich insights from a former NYCDOE Chancellor as well as a current New York State Regent, which added to the expert participant data set. The final chapter of this dissertation features interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations for policy, research, and practice.

Selection of Participants

I interviewed self-identified culturally relevant urban school principals with at least 5 years of experience in urban schools and specifically with experience in New York City public schools. I also interviewed self-identified culturally relevant urban school expert participants from the field of education. I identified expert participants as those with 30 years of experience in the field of education who have worked in both school building-level leadership and district-level leadership. I ensured that all expert participants had experience as a school principal and a school district superintendent, with experience in district-level management and systems as well as school systems disciplinary policy, as evidenced by their résumés and employment history. I

looked specifically for expert participants who had experience with disciplinary measures and systems that impacted African American and Latino students, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, White students, and Asian students because I believed they would provide better responses to help answer my research questions. These self-identified culturally relevant participants also demonstrated the capability to improve discipline and had track records for discipline change. I used a variety of strategies to recruit the participants, including phone calls, text messages, emails, and direct messages to social media accounts. See Table 3 for profiles of the administrators I interviewed for my study.

Table 3. *Profile of Administrators Interviewed*

Participant (Racial/Ethnic Group)	Category	Experience as Principal	Experience in Education	Length of Interview
Mr. Hydrogen (AA)	K-12	6.5	40+ Years	158 mins
Mr. Oxygen (AA)	Higher Education	11+	30+ Years	73 mins
Mr. Lithium (L)	K-12	10	18+ Years	52 mins
Mr. Potassium (W)	K-12	5+	14+	35 mins
Mr. Nitrogen (AA)	K-12 Retired	10+	25+	69 mins
Mr. Carbon (AA)	K-12 Retired	10+	20+	35 mins
Ms. Neon (W)	K-12	10	15+	43 mins
Ms. Sodium (AA)	K-12	8	15+	35 mins
Mr. Americium (W)	K-12 Retired	5+	25+	85 mins
Ms. Nickel (L)	K-12	10	20+	55 mins
Ms. Copper (W)	Higher Education	6	30+	50 mins
Mr. Helium (AA)	Higher Education	7	30+	76 mins

The participants in my study included experts from the field of education in urban school districts, each with over 3 decades of experience. Participants' ages ranged from 35 to 70 years of age. All interviews were held via a Zoom meeting and lasted on average 65 minutes (from 35 to 158 minutes). Participants' demographics included Female (F), Male (M), African American (AA), Latino (L), and White (W). Table 3 illustrates the sequential order of the interviews that

were conducted during the month of December of 2020. Each participant received an Invitation Letter (Appendix B) as well as a Participant Consent Form (Appendix C).

Participants included current Principals, Assistant Principals, Assistant Superintendents, Former Superintendents, Education Consultants, and a State Regent. I asked 20 questions in each interview (see Appendix D) and the open-ended nature of the questions invited the participants to expound on their beliefs about discipline, including their philosophy on discipline.

Participant Profiles

This section identifies the participants who were selected for my study. Each participant was selected for multiple reasons. The participants shared tremendous insights with their responses to my interview questions, including stories of impact, examples, and memorable moments of their leadership careers. Participants included both females and males with decades of experience in urban school leadership. There were four administrators with over thirty years of experience, beginning their educational career and experience during the nineteen nineties, marking the zero-tolerance policy era. There were four administrators with over twenty years of experience, beginning their educational career and experience during the two-thousands, marking the introduction of restorative justice to the criminal justice system.

The participants in my study were school leaders and or school district leaders in culturally diverse communities, with predominantly African American and Latino students in their school communities. I believed the participants in my study were culturally relevant because of their successful school leadership tenure in diverse schools where they incorporated student centered practices that increased student achievement and decreased student disciplinary problems. See Table 4 for participant school environment characteristics.

Table 4. *Participant School Environment Characteristics*

Participant (Racial/Ethnic Group)	School Characteristics/Setting	Demographics
Mr. Hydrogen (AA)	Community School District & Elementary School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Oxygen (AA)	Community School District & High School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Lithium (L)	Community High School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Potassium (W)	Community K-12 School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Nitrogen (AA)	Community Middle School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Carbon (AA)	Community K-8 School	African American & Latino Students
Ms. Neon (W)	Community High School	African American & Latino Students
Ms. Sodium (AA)	Community Elementary & High School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Americium (W)	Community School District & Middle School	African American & Latino Students
Ms. Nickel (L)	Community School District	African American & Latino Students
Ms. Copper (W)	Community School District & High School	African American & Latino Students
Mr. Helium (AA)	Community School District	African American & Latino Students

Ms. Neon

Ms. Neon is a White female in her 40s and is currently an Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning. Prior to entering district-level leadership, Ms. Neon was a principal on Special Assignment in the District from 2019-2020. Ms. Neon has also worked as building principal for a little over 2 years. Before joining her current district, she was an assistant principal for a little over 6 years. Ms. Neon was also a Supervisor at a Career Education Program for 6½ years, a position with building principal duties and responsibilities. Ms. Neon was in the classroom as an ESL teacher from 2000 to 2005. She has also been an adjunct professor since 2019. Ms. Neon earned her Bachelor's degree in Spanish and English as a Second Language (6-12), a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in ESL, a Master of Education in Organizational Leadership, and a Doctor of Education in Urban Education and Leadership. A memorable quote from her interview was "Principals set the expectations for their

buildings. So, they disrupt the systems or the processes in their buildings that get the results that we get."

Mr. Lithium

Mr. Lithium is a Latino male in his 40s. He has served as a mentor executive coach to school leaders since 2007. In 1997, Mr. Lithium began his pedagogical career as a high school Bilingual Social Studies teacher. He then became Assistant Principal of Administration in a high school. In 2006, he became the Principal of a campus high school. Mr. Lithium earned his Bachelor's degree in Economics and Business Administration as well as a Master's degree. A memorable quote from his interview was:

> So, the state of school discipline today is that education, unfortunately, is hardly one of the few or only fields where everybody thinks that they have all the answers because everybody thinks that they know how to be a principal because they went to school or something. I never pretend to tell my physician how to prescribe. I took my pet to the vet yesterday. I don't pretend to have a better opinion than the vet.

Mr. Oxygen

Mr. Oxygen is an African American male in his 50s and is currently an author, a mentor, a leadership Coach, a professor, and a CEO. Mr. Oxygen has earned a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Master's degree in Public Administration, a Master's degree in Education Administration and Supervision, and a third Master's degree in Urban Education which was part of his Ed.D. program in Education Leadership. Mr. Oxygen was a teacher for a total of 8 years, an assistant principal and the first African American assistant principal of pupil personnel services at a High School for a total of 3 years, and a principal for a total of 11 years. He also served as superintendent for 2 years. He has been an adjunct professor for 10 years. A memorable quote from his interview was:

> The schools that I ran and the district that I ran served children who were on the receiving end from other schools of those type of policies, so that when students would

> come from a place like, back then it was Spotford or Crossroads in Brooklyn or Horizons in the Bronx or Rikers Island, those students wouldn't have anywhere to go. Nobody would be willing to accept them into their schools, so they would come to my school or whether it be any of the alternative schools.

Mr. Potassium

Mr. Potassium is a White male in his late 30s and is currently an assistant principal and Special Education Coordinator. Mr. Potassium has been in this position for 2 years. Prior to that, he was a Special Education Administrator. Prior to that, Mr. Potassium served as a principal at a K-12 School for Students with Disabilities. Before serving as principal, Mr. Potassium served as principal of seventh and eighth grade at a Middle School. He earned a Bachelor's degree in English, a Master's (M.A.T.), and a second Master's degree in Education. A memorable quote from his interview was:

> …you know, some others, but I'll just say, in particular, that's what I've noted it tends to be the White female teachers who are afraid of what the young male students will do. And then, of course, particularly students of color who they're not necessarily used to knowing in any way other than, you know, the school setting.

Mr. Nitrogen

Mr. Nitrogen is an African American male in his 60s and is currently an education consultant. He is a retired middle school principal, identified by many as a transformational middle school principal. Mr. Nitrogen was credited with changing the learning environment at a middle school—from a struggling and dangerous school to a school with demonstrated student proficiency growth in state exams. Mr. Nitrogen encouraged me to enter school administration and stayed by my side as a mentor, especially when I became a principal. Mr. Nitrogen was principal for 9 years and has served as an education consultant for over 9 years. A memorable quote from his interview was "The cafeteria is always the heartbeat of your school. If your cafeteria is in check and in order, you'll know what's going on in your classroom. You'll know

what's going on in your school because most things start there. And if you go into the cafeteria and you sit with your students and you talk with the students and then you'll learn a lot about them and your school."

Mr. Carbon

Mr. Carbon is an African American male in his 40s and is currently the founding director of a nonprofit organization serving young people that helps them actualize their purpose. Prior to his work as director, Mr. Carbon was the Senior Director at a Graduate School of Education. Prior to that role, Mr. Carbon was a founding Instructional Designer at another digital learning nonprofit learning organization at a charter school. He then became the founding principal and Head of School of a charter school. Mr. Carbon served as principal for a little over 10 years. Mr. Carbon received his undergraduate degrees in Biology and Philosophy and a Master's degree in Educational Administration. A memorable quote from his interview was "…ultimately behavior and discipline is, again, a manifestation of whether or not students are engaged in your class, …whether or not lessons are interesting, so we spend a lot of time on professional development."

Mr. Hydrogen

Mr. Hydrogen is an African American male in his 70s. He began his career in education as a teacher. Mr. Hydrogen then became a Guidance Counselor and, from 1978 to 1982, served as Supervisor of Special Education. Mr. Hydrogen then became principal of an elementary school and served for 5 years. He was then selected as superintendent and served the district for a little over 10 years. During his tenure as superintendent, Mr. Hydrogen established two successful high schools in the district. He then served as a visiting professor. Additionally, Mr. Hydrogen served on many nonprofit boards. He received his Ed.D. and a Master's in Science. A memorable quote from his interview was "And, and, in fact, I'd go a step further. A lot of our

public institutions…institutions are really about maintenance right… let's keep everyone where they are, keep you in your place. And so, you know the way out of that is to have the kind of leadership that recognizes that and what do we, what do we have to do about that." He added, "And I think, you know, it's incumbent upon leadership to work with people to make sure that they understand developmentally how you work with kids."

Ms. Sodium

Ms. Sodium is an African American female in her 40s who is currently an Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum. She began her teaching career at an elementary school. After 7 years, Ms. Sodium then became a principal. Her career has spanned over two decades. Ms. Sodium earned her Bachelor's degree in Public Policy, then earned a Master's degree in Education, and a Certificate of Advanced Study, followed by a Doctorate in Education. A memorable quote from her interview was:

> But I think the other piece that influences it, is unconscious bias. People look at our, our Black and Brown students and hold different expectations about them whether they realize it or not, and have racialized perspectives on them whether they realize it or not. And don't always leverage the strength of students to prevent them from being in situations that result in them being suspended.

Mr. Americium

Mr. Americium is a White male in his 50s who is currently an Executive Director. He started his career in education as an elementary school special education teacher for 7 years and then became a crisis intervention teacher and a Special Education Supervisor. Mr. Americium then served as an assistant principal for 10 years, after which he became a principal and transformed the school during his 5-year tenure. Mr. Americium then became Community School Superintendent. A memorable quote from his interview was "You have to understand that a child doesn't know and you just try to understand them. And it's hard and it's just really hard

to do. And again, it comes down to even loving the kids if you love those kids just makes it a whole lot easier."

Ms. Nickel

Ms. Nickel is a Latina female in her 40s who is currently an executive principal. She has vast experience as a successful school leader who now works with two separate schools. Her educational leadership journey began as a Campus Instructional Coordinator/Assistant Principal, where she served for a little over 10 years. Ms. Nickel then became Superintendent/Head of School. She earned her Bachelor's and Master's in Administration and Leadership in Education. A memorable quote from this interview was "I think it's a principal's job to really create an understanding in what the vision is for the school. What is suspension and what role should it play and at what point should occur."

Ms. Copper

Ms. Copper is a White female in her 50s who is currently a professor. She began her career as a high school English teacher. After teaching for 16 years, Ms. Copper then became a school librarian and a teacher of library studies. Following that, she became an assistant principal for a couple of years, and then a high school principal. Ms. Copper then entered district-level leadership as a Local Instructional Superintendent. After Ms. Copper's district-level work, she then became an assistant adjunct professor in two Graduate Schools of Education. A memorable quote from her interview was "I think that we need more leaders of color brought in…. That doesn't always mean they're gonna understand if you're Black, you understand the Black

community, but there is a lot of research around Black leaders building the community for those students."

Mr. Helium

Mr. Helium is an African American male who is 70 years old. His vast educational experience spans 5 decades on both coasts of the United States. Mr. Helium became the Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for a little over 2 years, then became Superintendent of Schools. Mr. Helium then became an adjunct assistant professor in Urban Education. Mr. Helium received a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree in Urban Education, and a Doctorate in Educational Administration. A memorable quote from his interview was "That you made a bad judgment here and I want you to know that judgment can't be repeated again, and this is, in a way, my way of basically saying to you, I don't want you to do that again and I want you to grow from this, I want you to think about it. And I'm going to give you a punishment that enables you to do that."

Data Collection

I collected data through the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1998) with each participant (see Appendix A). Each interview, which took approximately 65 minutes, was designed to capture stories, narratives, and accounts from the lived experiences of the participants in my study. Interviews were conducted during the month of December 2020. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to meet any of the participants in person and instead held all of the interviews virtually through the Zoom software program. Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed the informed consent form with the participants and shared with them the goals of my study. Interviews were audio-recorded as well as video-recorded via Zoom. The length of the interviews ranged from 35 to 158 minutes (see

Table 2). The semi-structured, open-ended interview format allowed for the study participants to share in-depth stories and feelings throughout the questions (Glesne, 1999). Additionally, I kept a record of interesting quotes and stories shared by the participants and the way the stories and excerpts made me feel. After every interview, I debriefed by taking note of my observations, thoughts, wonderings, questions, and information I had to keep in mind for the next interview.

To recruit the participants, I emailed each of them an invitation to take part in the study. Once participants confirmed they would be part of the study, I sent them a choice of available interview times from my schedule. After the participants confirmed the interview time that worked best for them, I sent them an email with the Zoom meeting link and asked them to return the consent form for this study. On the day of the interview, once the participant had logged in, I asked them if it was okay to record the interview on Zoom and by hand-held device, as outlined on the consent form. Upon agreement, I started to record and began with the interview questions. After the participants had answered all of the interview questions, I asked if there was anything else they wanted to share. If they had nothing else to share, I ended the Zoom meeting. Once the Zoom meeting was made available on my dashboard, I downloaded the meeting recording and the transcript of the meeting from Zoom. Interviews were audio-recorded and video-recorded using Zoom software and recordings were stored on Zoom-managed servers. After analysis, all recordings were deleted from Zoom servers. After these steps were completed for each participant, I then added all of the transcripts to NVivo, a qualitative analysis software.

Data Analysis

As shared by Glesne (1998), the data analysis of my data was filled with much anxiety as I began to organize and make meaning of the data I had collected in this study. I began my analysis by reviewing the participants' responses in each transcript and identifying different

codes that came up in their responses. Once I identified these codes, I separated each participant response for each code into tables that allowed me to see all of their responses with the individual coding. Once I did this for each code, I moved on to identifying themes within each code to identify as my findings. I repeated this cycle of creating tables and identifying common themes for each node. I also incorporated the Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al., 2011) components and created a table for each theme as a subset of each framework component. I placed the themes that emerged from participant responses on "background and sensemaking" in the Professional Duty—Leading for Equity, Engagement, and Excellence category. I placed the theme that emerged from participants' "discipline philosophies" in the Personal Journey—Culture Proficiency component/category?. I placed the theme that emerged from participants on "role of principals regarding discipline and suspension rates" in the Political Context—Demographic Divide, Competing Values, Ideologies, and Perspectives component/category?. I placed the theme that emerged from participants' responses on "principal and superintendent decisions" in the Pedagogical Approach—Culturally Relevant and Antiracist category.

As I collected my data, I made sure to record the trends and patterns that became evident upon review of the interview transcripts, while at the same time taking notes of my analysis of the data (Glesne, 1998). As the researcher, I also took note of context sensitivity and interpretation, and kept in mind that analysis is ongoing and at times cyclical (Bloomberg, 2007). My interviews allowed me to gain insights into and perspectives about the expert participants and their values and beliefs about school disciplinary policies as well as the implementation of these policies in order to support students of color in their schools.

Analytic Notes and Transcripts

As explained by Maxwell (2005), I wrote analytic memos after interviews to collect my initial reflections and emergent themes that arose after each interview. These memos were an important step in my analysis. Each interview was transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber as well as by the transcription option in the Zoom software. I then reviewed all of the transcripts against the original recordings to ensure accuracy and correct any transcription errors (i.e., descriptive validity). I also relied on the use of verbatim transcripts for the development of the codes in my findings.

Development of Preliminary Codes

In addition to the theoretical codes, I used from my literature review (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I developed a set of emic or NVivo codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) from the data/transcripts. I reviewed the transcripts and memos by coding (Maxwell, 2005; Saldana, 2015) in order to enhance the level of analysis. I utilized codes to identify the overarching theme(s) of the expert participants' responses, the terms and phrases that were shared, and overall discussions. For example, the participants in my study shared items such as *expectations* and *reduction in school suspensions* as key factors that affect disciplinary protocols in schools. These items were coded as *Discipline Philosophy*. See Appendix E for my preliminary code list. I augmented this list with new codes throughout my data analysis, as needed.

After all rounds of interviews were completed, I systematically analyzed all of the data. I identified the most commonly identified codes, both theoretical and emic, by the use of counting strategies and connecting strategies (Maxwell, 2005).

Credibility and Validity

To establish credibility in my study, I triangulated the data collection process to include the interview audio recordings, my notes, interview transcripts, and related literature. Once I had completed all of the semi-structured interviews, I emailed the participants copies of their interview transcripts and asked them to review and inform me if their transcript accurately captured their responses. This allowed me the opportunity to capture participants' perspectives and develop ideas and interpretations (Glesne, 1999). I paid special attention to the alignment of my own representations as the researcher with those of my study participants, particularly how aligned those representations were to one another. Follow-up with my participants to ensure the data I collected identified the intended meaning of the participants also allowed me to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A researcher has many responsibilities throughout the data collection and analysis stages of a study. One responsibility is to be mindful of researcher bias throughout the study, which can affect the validity of the findings in the study (Creswell, 2013). I paid special attention to how I interacted with the participants in my study and my relationship with the participants in my study (since I knew some of the participants prior to this study) to be mindful of researcher bias. I also focused on how the participants may have altered their own behavior as a result of what they deemed was the concern of the study and what they thought would be valuable for it (the Hawthorne effect) (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations

The focus of this study was to explore how urban school principals conceptualized school discipline policies in ways that changed the way students of color were disciplined and how their values and beliefs informed the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that

supported the education of students of color. I selected to delimit this study to this particular population because I wanted to focus on principal decision making and actions, as they related to the implementation of school discipline and students of color. The demanding schedule of a dissertation study and a full-time job resulted in time and financial constraints which limited my decision to interview a total of 12 participants. While perspectives of other school leaders who work in suburban and rural school districts may have contributed to this study, those experiences were not included here. Another limitation to this study was the assumption that the school leader accounts and experiences shared by the participants reflected accounts and experiences of all urban school leaders. This study was intended to serve as an opportunity to explore this particular research in the future. The boundaries of the study included participants' reflections and selective memory when answering each question (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The participants were also interviewed virtually, which may have restricted how talkative and willing they were to expand on their responses.

Questions about participants' experiences with school discipline policies as a classroom teacher or assistant principal were purposefully not examined in this study because my focus was solely on their experiences as school leaders. Additionally, I purposely did not ask participants about what they could have done differently pertaining to school discipline because I was interested in solely learning about their actions and decision making. I sent invitation emails to potential participants I had either worked with in the past or were recommended as urban school principals with a record of high achievement and record of a safe and orderly school building. These recommendations impacted the number of participants in this study and served as another delimitation. My knowledge of the participants in prior work environments and roles may have also limited or biased the information I collected as interviewer. Participants may have been

unwilling to share aspects of their role as school leaders that displayed them in a negative or unpleasant manner.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

> So, we have to create leaders that can relate to their schools in the way that you relate to your children, our children. That's a leadership question. So, we need to work on that training.... Now you have the different leadership standards. Nowhere in the standards does it address what we're talking about now, as it relates to the culturally responsiveness of our children. And being more than responsive but being culturally embedded. (Mr. Oxygen)

This chapter includes a collection of interview responses, narratives, and themes that emerged from the participants' responses. The following two research questions lie at the center of this study:

1. How do urban school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined?
2. How do the values and beliefs of urban school leaders inform their implementation of school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color?

The following four themes emerged from participant responses: *School disciplinary measures should help students, not hurt them; School discipline policies dictate principals' action or inaction; School discipline data require analysis in order to tell the whole story;* and *focusing on teacher behavior can change student misbehavior.* Each participant shared his or her beliefs about school discipline, the disproportionate discipline of Black and Latino students, the role that school leaders played when it came to the discipline of students of color, and the specific steps and decisions they made to support students in their schools. Participants conceptualized school discipline policies within the context of their school community—specifically how they ensured that students of color in their own school community were not overly suspended and repeatedly removed from the classroom. Participants shared stories, examples, triumphs, and challenges of their journey as school leaders. Their values and beliefs

included the responsibility of the school leader to cultivate a school environment where students could thrive. They used their beliefs of equitable learning environments to create systems and structures in their schools where students had someone they could talk to if they were in trouble. This was valuable because since the school leaders built the foundation of the school environment, they had the freedom to create the structures and systems of their choice, which included hiring practices and culturally relevant teacher training. Additionally, participants shared that there were valid occasions for Zero Tolerance disciplinary measures, for example, when a weapon was brought into school. This belief shaped the way they assessed each individual incident, especially higher-level infractions, with students of color in their schools, instead of immediate suspensions. Their values framed the way they evaluated the incident to try and identify the reason the student committed the infraction and if they needed supports and guidance after the disciplinary infraction. Participants' beliefs and values were strongly influenced by the negative, long-lasting effects of exclusionary discipline measures that repeatedly removed students from the classroom.

The Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al., 2011) helped organize and frame my analysis of the participants' responses. The interview questions were arranged into four different sections: background, beliefs, sensemaking, and principal/superintendent decisions (Appendix A). I placed the responses in different sections of the Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al., 2011). The participants' background and sensemaking responses were categorized under Professional Duty—Leading for Equity, Engagement, and Excellence. The participants' beliefs and discipline philosophies were categorized under Personal Journey—Culture Proficiency. The participants' responses on the role of principals regarding discipline and suspension rates were categorized under Political

Context—Demographic Divide, Competing Values, Ideologies, and Perspectives. Participants' responses for principal and superintendent decisions were categorized under Pedagogical Approach—Culturally Relevant and Antiracist.

Background

When asked about whether the participants felt they were prepared for the principalship, seven participants stated they were prepared for the role. I asked the participants this question to capture their preparedness and predisposition to take on the leader role. If participants had not felt they were ready to serve as school principal, this would make their ability to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence much more challenging. Although a little over half of the participants felt they were prepared for the principal position, nine shared they spent more than half of their time on discipline during their first year in the position. This was significant because it highlighted the amount of work they had invested in the school environment and culture. The majority of the participants explained the work they had to do to turn around the culture of the school for which they were now responsible. Participants also shared that after their first year in charge, they were able to make significant changes in school climate and significantly lowered the amount of time they spent on discipline in Year Two as principal.

Theme 1: School disciplinary measures should help students, not hurt them.

> As long as it is accompanied by some sense of fairness, that if you can explain why you are doing something and you can explain it in a way that is useful and helpful to have student's growth rather than to a student's sense of punishment. (Mr. Helium)

As noted by Humphreys (1999), Weber (2003), and Yavuzer (1986), the goal of school discipline was to foster a sense of responsibility and self-control of the students by supporting their mental, emotional, and social development. When I asked the participants about their discipline philosophy, the following overarching theme emerged: *School disciplinary measures*

should help students, not hurt them. One participant identified the need for school leaders to find alternatives to suspensions so as to have other disciplinary measures utilized by the school first and leaving suspension as a last resort. Mr. Helium explained:

> It is really a matter of doing these things much more with much greater discernment than we've ever done before. And doing them with a more creative understanding of what it is that should be an appropriate response. Instead of expelling or suspending a student, maybe the appropriate response is to just ask them to tone it down. Instead of sending a student out of class and to the principal's office. (Mr. Helium)

Mr. Potassium identified the different ways schools could help students learn from their behavior and actions after an incident. He identified the role that the adults in the school community played when it came to teaching and coaching students about acceptable school behaviors and the long-lasting impact of that behavior.

> I think my philosophy is that you want to teach students how to be effective and so their behavior needs to be effective to help them be successful. And so, a lot of school discipline is really (on) trying to coach students into what behaviors are going to let them do you know what they want to do in life. (Mr. Potassium)

Ms. Neon added the need to have the school community help students understand why their behavior was not appropriate. She went on to identify *how* the adults in the school community interacted with students mattered.

> My philosophy around school discipline is that consequences should help students learn and grow and change their behavior. So, when we think about helping an identifying behavior that we're trying to change for students, how do we interact and find out the cause of it and what's happening? I think a lot of times I know students are trying to communicate with us something that they're not feeling comfortable with and adults don't always like to listen to kids and make a lot of assumptions. (Ms. Neon)

Participants shared the need to make sure students understood why they were being disciplined so as not to have students fall into a cycle of repetitive exclusionary measures. It was important for participants to establish a culture where students would learn from their actions, not just be reprimanded. This illustrated the participants' needs to incorporate high expectations

for all students and staff alike in their school communities. Mr. Americium stated how difficult this was for school leaders:

> And I think it's about expectations. Raising the expectations of your staff is one thing, but also of students. It's people's belief and expectations and I don't know how you change that, again, you just keep raising awareness to it, keep giving tools and resources to help support schools… (Mr. Americium)

Setting expectations was no easy task; Mr. Americium identified how challenging it was during his time as a school leader. Perseverance was key for Mr. Americium when he worked with the school community and continuously reminded them of the role and impact high expectations had on students. Mr. Carbon also shared how high expectations impacted the overall school environment:

> In order for learning to take place, classrooms need to be structured, there needs to be high behavior expectations and (there) needs to be overall accountability. (Mr. Carbon)

Participants also noted the importance of holding students in a safe space, where they could trust school leadership as well as teachers to support and guide them. They shared that by establishing a school culture that embodied this sense of safety throughout the school environment, it would be easier for students to accept school rules and understand that the rules were not made to hurt them, but provide them with structure and guidance. Mr. Lithium explained:

> The school is the extension of the home. Our children often spend more time in school than with their own parents…. So, it's grounded in that the school is an extension of the home, and that there need to be very clear, concise and consistent rules about what is acceptable behavior…. These are the rules, and everyone needs to accept them. There need to be clear and consistent consequences to those misbehaviors. (Mr. Lithium)

Mr. Hydrogen spoke about student perceptions of teachers and staff alike in school. It was important for Mr. Hydrogen to note how students perceived and understood success in school through the eyes of their teachers. He shared how important it was for teachers to

understand how students connected with them in school, and even more when they felt like they were in a safe space.

> The research on poor kids of color is that they are very much concerned with what the teacher feels about what they can do in school. In fact, most of the research on this subject suggests that kids of color care more concerned about what the teacher feels about what they do in school, then their parents. So, what that suggests is that kids come to school wanting to have a relationship with the teacher. (Mr. Hydrogen)

Participants' responses highlighted their cultural proficiency through their personal journeys as school principal. This first theme, school disciplinary measures should help students, not hurt them, expanded on school leaders' values and beliefs of creating an environment where students could learn from their mistakes and learn how to make better choices. As a result of school leaders' conceptualization of school discipline policies' potential to harm students, school leaders expressed the need to find alternatives to suspensions and exclusionary disciplinary measures in order to support students and not increase the likelihood of students entering the juvenile justice system. The first theme identifies the need for principals to recognize that disciplinary measures have the opportunity to help students and not exclusively impact them in an adverse manner. School leaders identified various strategies and structures they implemented into their schools, such as coaching, peed mediation and guidance opportunities and interventions, that provided opportunities for students to reflect on their decisions and learn how to make better decisions in the future. The next area of analysis were participants' responses about the role of principals/superintendents on school discipline and suspension rates. These responses illustrated the Political Context within which leaders operated and highlighted the demographic divide, competing values, ideologies, and perspectives that often restrict school principals' actions and decision making (Horsford et al., 2011).

Theme 2: School discipline policies dictate principals' action or inaction.

> What happens is you're restricting principles and holding their hands and telling them what they can and can't do from that tower (Tweed-NYC Central Office), you're not really, not leading again. So, I don't know who's leading because it's not about that. You have to live the life of the principal before you can tell a principal what to do and how to do it. You can't do that to principals.… (Mr. Americium)

Another theme that emerged from the interview responses was the impact school discipline policies, practices, and procedures had on principals' ability to make decisions and impose disciplinary measures in schools. Here, Mr. Americium talked about the role New York City Department of Education Central Office (in the Tweed building) has on principals' abilities to make disciplinary decisions. Each participant spoke about the impact school discipline policies had on their role as school principal and head disciplinarian. While half of the principals shared that they were responsible for suspension rates in their schools and their decisions to impose suspensions were guided by school discipline policies and mandates, four principals shared that the discipline policies actually hindered their ability to impose suspensions and minimized their role as the school leader, impacting the use of discretion when selecting a disciplinary measure. Researchers have often noted administrators' use of discretion or use of judgment when dealing with disciplinary matters (Ackerman, 2003; Chesler et al., 1979; Clark, 2002; Hall, 1999; Heilmann, 2006; Lufler, 1979; Manley-Casimir, 1977-1978; Rossow, 1984). Some participants, however, shared that their decision-making abilities were taken away from them as a result of new, more progressive and restorative forms of discipline. Additionally, these restorative justice practices reduced their ability to suspend students who they believed needed the disciplinary measures to maintain order in their schools. Consequently, other students misbehaved when they noticed nothing happened to their peers, creating a domino effect.

Mr. Americium recalled an instance when he was visiting a school as superintendent and the principal was very proud that he had zero disciplinary infractions reported in the system that school year. Mr. Americium had a hard time believing that none of the students in the school ever misbehaved and, consequently, the principal had nothing to report. The problem that Mr. Americium identified was that principals were now hiding data to stay off lists that identified them as persistently dangerous or out of control. When some principals realized they could simply avoid any repercussions, a letter to file or being removed, as a result of strict discipline policies, they simply stopped reporting. This did nothing for the students in the school and the school community as a whole.

> I used to go to schools and look at the data…and the principal will be sitting there so proud that he had zero incidents in the school. That would be the worst thing for me to go into your school to see zero because that principal sitting there so proud to say, I have no incidents that made be more furious than a school that had thousands of level ones or twos, or threes. Because you're not reporting…. (Mr. Americium)

Mr. Nitrogen spoke passionately about how principals today cannot do anything anymore. Having spent most of his leadership experience in very challenging schools, he relied very much on his ability to suspend students when they fought, brought drugs to school, or demonstrated violent behavior. Mr. Nitrogen shared how difficult it would be for him to be a principal with today's strict discipline policies. He vehemently talked about principals' inaction as a result of the disciplinary policies in place today. The limitations described by Mr. Nitrogen identified his positionality within the school as school principal and the impact these limitations have on school culture, accentuating the political context he was a part of as school leader.

> It's very difficult to suspend a student now. I don't know what a student would have to do to get a student suspended now because the people who are dealing with these students are not in the schools or is making decisions not to suspend, they're not in the schools. And suspensions and discipline in the schools have become political. It's a political thing now. They're looking at politics rather than looking at what's best for

> schools. So, the role of a principal has been diminished in terms of discipline. (Mr. Nitrogen)

Mr. Oxygen echoed Mr. Nitrogen's sentiments about principals hiding disciplinary data from central office. Despite no incidents reported in the portal, students were receiving suspensions, which created a space of chaos and confusion in the school environment. Leaders like these illustrated the competing values that were part of the political context of the school community. Their actions were misleading and not in the interest of students.

> Unfortunately, what I have found in my experience is that there are principals who will not suspend on record. In other words, they won't do what's called a formal suspension, but yet they will do informal suspensions. An informal suspension, by my definition, is a suspension that's not recorded within the accountability system of suspensions. I think that's unfortunate. The policies are really geared towards reducing the number of suspensions because there's a belief that if you reduce the level of suspensions, then the students can remain in school longer, and then academic achievement can be raised or improved. But I don't necessarily believe that that's the true outcome of it. I think that principals have been shirking their responsibility when it comes to suspension or discipline because they don't want to appear as if their school is out of control or that they're having disciplinary issues. (Mr. Oxygen)

Other participants spoke about taking away principal discretion. Such policies were in essence taking their power away from them and leading students to believe there were no longer consequences to their behaviors.

> So, the discretion in order to make these decisions and these moves has slowly been taken away from principals, and I think to the detriment of the school system and kids, really, because now, we have instances, too many I think, where the principal cannot dispense discipline and so what's happening is that the children are feeling enabled to act this way. I'm talking about my own children, our children: our Black, Hispanic, minority children where, in school, you're trying to teach them a better way, but there aren't any consequences. The principal doesn't have the resources, the guidance resources, in order to help the family either. You can't discipline them and you can't help them. (Mr. Lithium)

One participant shared a viewpoint on the benefit of school discipline policies. Mr. Potassium explained that when principals were faced with discipline policies that limited the

number of suspensions they could issue, it was actually good because it meant fewer students would receive disciplinary measures and be removed from the classroom.

> I mean, I think whenever I see policies and procedures that make it more difficult to suspend students, I think that's good. And I think that can kind of minimize their role because if it's very hard for them to do, they're not going to do it. (Mr. Potassium)

Mr. Oxygen talked about the opportunity principals had to exercise equity when disciplining students in school. This was a different perspective from other participants because he was the only one who brought up the implementation of equity when it came to discipline policies. Mr. Oxygen explained:

> Really, when it comes to the suspensions, I see principals as practicing, in the true sense of the word, equity. In other words, measure your decisions, when it comes to suspending a student. And suspension can come in different forms. You could be suspended from a class. You could be suspended from activities. You could be suspended from school. And so, I think that principals need to weigh that. (Mr. Oxygen)

The way Mr. Oxygen explained the practice of equity by principals framed the political context in which he operated as principal and highlighted his ideologies and perspectives on equity and suspensions. Another participant who talked about the political context that framed disciplinary measures was Mr. Hydrogen, who voiced the role that policy itself played for everyone in the school community, not just the adults or students exclusively. Mr. Hydrogen identified the divide that often existed between policies for adults and policies for students.

> So, here's what you know on the way leaders communicate their expectations as to their policies. That's what the policy is supposed to do, a good policy is supposed to communicate expectations to everyone. And what happens when it comes to areas of discipline behavior. What we call policies are really not policies. They're kind of like reactionary behavior directives, right. But, but the policy is not just for students. The policies are for the whole community. So, if your policy is only directed at students, it's really not a policy designed to impact the culture…. So your policy is essentially communicating your expectations and the way in which you're going to be treated. (Mr. Hydrogen)

The second theme identified the impact that school disciplinary policies have had on school principals as well as the way it has hindered principals from maintaining autonomy and control of their discipline data. As a result of current accountability climates across school districts, it has become more challenging for principals to report disciplinary incidents and maintain a sense of control of their school disciplinary matters. Some participants shared that they did not even report disciplinary infractions in order to stay under the radar and away from school district scrutiny. Participants conceptualization of school discipline policies ultimately questioned the role that disciplinary reporting plays when it comes to the school community, school level leadership and school discipline data. Participants identified the need to create systems and structures that allowed them to track discipline data that respected principal autonomy and decision-making which illustrated their values and beliefs in regards to the implementation of school discipline policies in ways that supported their students and increase their success in school.

Theme 3: School discipline data requires analysis in order to tell the whole story.

> One of the challenges for leaders is that if you only look at the data, it will lead you down the path of being over analytical, so the numbers in and of themselves don't tell the full story. (Mr. Hydrogen)

Another theme that emerged from the interview responses was how school leaders made sense of their discipline data. I asked the participants to share what discipline data meant to them and how they analyzed their school data for a given school year. Participants shared the kind of school discipline data they received, the strategies they used to understand the discipline data, the limitations of the data, and the way they created next steps to address areas of concern. Eleven of the participants shared their insights on how they assessed discipline data in their schools. A school leader's capability to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence was especially critical

when it came to the discipline of students, specifically students of color in urban schools. The high number of disproportionate discipline rates of students of color demanded principals to take part in data analysis protocols to align their professional duty to that of equity, engagement, and excellence. Mr. Potassium, Mr. Americium, Ms. Copper, Ms. Neon, and Ms. Sodium spoke specifically about the trends and patterns they identified in the discipline data, which illustrated their ability to lead for equity as school principal.

> I think you just really need to look at one, the direction it's moving and then to who it's impacting, you know so you need to look at which groups it's impacting and see what those patterns are see where the inequities are and then, you know, try and set both your policies and provide the professional development to hopefully attack those inequities. (Mr. Potassium)

Mr. Potassium also articulated the need to incorporate professional development for teachers in order to equip them with the necessary skills to improve the way they discipline students in the classroom. This highlighted the opportunity for engagement, not only for school leaders and staff but also for teachers with other teachers in the school building. This engagement helped staff make sense of the discipline data.

> So as a principal, you know, I used to look at my numbers all the time. I used to look at the time of day, that used to be where the incident was happening. The time of day may have to readjust where your staff would post and changing the schedule reduced the movement of students, you try to do everything possible by looking at the data, so you could correct it. (Mr. Americium)

Mr. Americium explained the process he would use to identify what the data were saying and then identified the necessary changes that were implemented to correct the problem(s). Changes became a domino effect that would require changing programs, staff posts, and other components of the school day so the number of incidents would start going down in specific locations of the school. These strategies and decisions taken by Mr. Americium spoke to his

willingness to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence as part of his professional duty as a school principal.

> So, we had data teams which have evolved into equity teams where we would look at not only you know Math scores and the ELA scores but the suspension rates among girls and boys and different ethnic groups and then individualized student issues and rates and we would look at what incidents are happening the most and where they are happening. (Ms. Copper)

Ms. Copper articulated the practices she incorporated into her school building to foster a sense of engagement with her teams, specifically the data and equity teams. Ms. Copper shared the specificity of the team's data analysis, highlighting student subgroups by race and gender. Such specificity was another example of data analysis with an equity lens to reduce the disproportionality of disciplinary measures between students of color and their peers. All of these actions represented the professional duty of school leaders within the Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al., 2011).

> I think you look at... well, I know I look at trends across our district, first of all, in terms of around race, gender, grade levels. What are we looking at in terms of number of incidents, type of incidents? What types of consequences are we giving? Then how do you look at school specific data? Then where are the locations of those data? So, I think sometimes administrators will start trying to really focus on classroom practice thinking that's going to impact their discipline data and really all the infractions are in the hallways. So, it's like, okay, actually what's going on in the hallways or in passing time, or who's engaging with your kids in the hallways that it's causing things to escalate or what does that data mean? So, I think as a district, we look at across our system, but when you're a really large district, of course you can see trends, but it doesn't get you down to kind of that school story. (Ms. Neon)

Ms. Neon shared how she looked at data sets for disciplinary infractions and described the ways she would work through the data with her team. She even noted that although principals identified an analysis focus, it was critical to review the data often to better guide their focus and efforts. Ms. Neon also shared her perspective as a district-level leader, concluding that despite

seeing trends across a large system, more analysis was required to grasp the entire story of a school's discipline data.

> So, we do a lot of focus on data and it's been really interesting over the years and this role to talk with principals about the data sets that they pay attention to. And so, we do spend a lot of time on our discipline referral data as much as we do in our suspension data and we look at it from many different angles. You know, we look at it from time of day, time of week you know what activity was occurring at that point in time. We look at who was doing the referring. So, is it the same teacher who's always referring this particular student or doing all the referrals in the building? And then one of the metrics that prove really important for some of my more difficult schools was looking at what percentage of the children were generating the most referrals with a building and beginning to realize that most students were able to be redirected and not incur another discipline referral after that first incident versus the students who were generating you know ten percent of the referrals for the building. I've really helped them to kind of begin to identify the tiers of behaviors that exist in their school and how they can begin to support those students in and different ways. (Ms. Sodium)

Ms. Sodium also provided a district leadership perspective in her work with principals. She shared the different ways that she engaged participants with data analyses, having school principals examine the location of incidents, time of day/week, and—even a step further—identifying which staff member is doing the referring of students in the school building. This example of leadership for equity, engagement, and excellence highlighted the different ways school leaders worked with their staff to reduce school discipline and student misbehavior. These measures ensured that all aspects of the data were being examined since the data alone were incomplete. Mr. Helium, Mr. Lithium, and Mr. Oxygen spoke about the notion of deconstructing the data.

> I think you have to deconstruct it. It's one thing to see the numbers, they will show disproportionality in terms of all aspects of discipline, suspension, and expulsion in class suspension, school suspensions, et cetera. And I think when you deconstruct it, you have to really look below how these decisions were made, like what went into the decision. (Mr. Helium)

Mr. Helium shared the need to examine and question the decision-making process of all adults in the building. The way adults made decisions, including the data they used, impacted the students and adults alike in the school community.

> I think that data, like a lot of things, can be twisted and turned to see things in many, many, many different ways. I think you've got to really look at it on a granular level, on a very granular level. Especially in New York City here, we have such diverse communities where you're ranging all the way from District 26 to District 6. It's so different. I don't think you could even compare both districts. (Mr. Lithium)

Mr. Lithium specifically spoke about the diversity of school districts within the New York City context and the necessity to deconstruct the data as a result of such vast differences from one school district to another. Such diversity across a system could have created different leadership practices which resulted in different discipline data sets. These differences may have resulted in inconsistent measures of equity and engagement by school leaders.

> It's hard to make meaning of it, in the sense of being able to rely on the data as a true indicator of what's going on within the schools, because of the underreporting of incidents and the informal or unofficial suspension of students. For me, I don't find the district suspension data to be valid. Yes, I find it to be invalid because of the unfortunate practices of school leaders, particularly the principal and the assistant principals and the deans. (Mr. Oxygen)

Mr. Oxygen was one of the few participants who explicitly called out the behavior of some school principals, assistant principals, and deans alike. It was important for Mr. Oxygen to communicate the role that this group of school leaders played when it came to the discipline data. In particular, principal decisions to underreport data or omit and change discipline infraction entries contributed to the problem with overall discipline data sets. These practices created inconsistencies, which directly affected the credibility of the discipline data and the ability of school leaders to address the discipline problems in their schools. Such behavior illustrated a lack of awareness of the school community, and impacted the school leaders' abilities to lead and increase equity, engagement, and excellence in their school communities.

> It's difficult because when you look at data. It doesn't tell the story of the entire child, not the whole child. And so, um, so I feel like we need to rethink what discipline data looks like to tell the whole story of the child. And I do feel there's certain systems that are already in place like response to intervention, where you look at the whole child, including how they develop mentally from birth to anything happening with the child. That's a lot of data that needs to be gathered to tell us a story. (Ms. Nickel)

Another component of the participant responses regarding data analysis and sensemaking was how often they used a rubric to assess or measure disciplinary infractions in their building, whether they received support to analyze their discipline data and create next steps to address the problems, or if they ever received an evaluation score from their supervisor pertaining to their discipline infractions. Only two participants shared they were routinely involved in all three of the practices. Eight of the participants never received a rubric to use regarding disciplinary measures for incidents and infractions. One participant shared that she had a rubric as an Impact School, identified as being in need of district intervention because of the high number of serious disciplinary infractions in the building. Two of the participants who worked with or had experience in charter organizations shared that they did receive rubrics and regularly used them for disciplinary measures.

Additionally, they shared that assessment of their disciplinary data through the use of rubrics was common practice in their learning communities. Eight participants had not received an evaluation from a supervisor pertaining to their disciplinary data. One participant shared that he received an end-of-year evaluation that talked about school environment, but it did not include a quantifiable report about specific discipline data. Another participant shared that Impact Schools received evaluations; finally, two participants offered that they had received evaluations from their supervisors that included student discipline.

Seven participants had not received feedback from their supervisors or district office team. Four participants shared they received feedback; two of those participants worked in or had experience in

charter organizations. One participant shared she received feedback only when she asked her supervisor(s) for it. One important finding to note was that most of the participants did receive feedback from members of the school community, including students, which they valued. The third theme identified the need for school leaders to analyze their discipline data in order to understand what the discipline data reveals about their school building. Participants shared that they did not regularly analyze their discipline data and that it was not an area of focus or discussion from their district leader or team, consequently, reducing the amount of time that was spent on this aspect of the role. Participants' conceptualization of school discipline policies lead them to identify the need to analyze their school discipline data, and be able to identify trends and patterns regarding student demographics, recidivism, location of incidents in the school building, and which groups of students were receiving disproportionate numbers of exclusionary disciplinary measures. School leaders' values and beliefs informed their decisions to analyze discipline data with school stake holds to better understanding the impact disciplinary measures had on their students and how they could improve the systems and structures that existed in their school community to address and remedy the disproportionality that was revealed by the data.

Theme 4: Focusing on teacher behavior can change student misbehavior

> So, we have to create leaders that can relate to their schools in the way that you relate to your children, our children. That's a leadership question. So, we need to work on that training. We need to change the...now you have the different leadership standards. Nowhere in the standards does it address what we're talking about now, as it relates to the culturally responsiveness of our children. And being more than responsive but being culturally embedded. (Mr. Oxygen)

Another theme that emerged from the interview responses was how school leaders impacted the behavior of the adults in their school buildings, resulting in how adults impacted the behavior of the students in the building. Teacher-student interactions can have positive or detrimental effects on students in school (Al-Yagon, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Wang et al.,

2013). School leaders must assess and evaluate how teachers in their schools treat students to ensure a positive and welcoming learning environment for all students. Participants shared stories of the strategies they used to identify positive teacher behaviors and relationships with their students as well as negative behaviors and relationships. The most critical aspect of this evaluation was to identify how teacher behaviors impacted student behaviors; if the teacher behaviors contributed to the misbehavior of the student; and what steps the teacher took to resolve an incident in a culturally sensitive, responsive, and antiracist manner. Six of the participants explained the most important step a school leader could take to improve the discipline in a school was to share the renewed school mission and goal to all members of the school community in order to ensure that everyone knows the policies and procedures that should be followed in school.

> So, I think, you know, the main procedures were tracking it so making sure that we were collecting data on it and that data was, you know, presented to teachers and available to families on an ongoing basis. And that, I think, just trying to explain my philosophy and how that would look versus the policy. So, helping people understand that just because something was written and they might understand it, one way that didn't mean that I was going to understand it that way. You know, and also to kind of let folks know that at the end of the day, I have the final word and decision and that's just part of my job and my responsibility and you know if they're interested in that, then they should take on that role too. (Mr. Potassium)

Mr. Potassium explained the need he felt to discuss the discipline policies with his staff to make sure they all understood the policies. More importantly, he offered staff the opportunity to discuss with him his philosophy and school policies as they pertained to student discipline, all while reminding the adults that he had the final word in any disciplinary matter. Mr. Potassium wanted to make sure that the entire school community was grounded in pedagogical approaches that were culturally relevant and supported students. Similarly, Mr. Nitrogen identified the steps

he took as school principal to change the climate of his school and reduce the number of disciplinary infractions.

> I guess one of the first things that I did was to have an assembly and talk to the kids. The second thing is to let the teachers know that it was a new day and that discipline problems would be taken care of. The other thing was to institute a uniform policy. And the next thing I did, I would basically do is walk the building. If you don't know your building, you can't bring about discipline. So, I was in and out of my classrooms, in the hallways all day long and my administrators. I didn't allow administrators to be in their classrooms during instructional time. For that six hours and twenty minutes, they had to be in a classroom, in the hallways. They had to be in and out of classrooms all day long. They had to be in the cafeteria. (Mr. Nitrogen)

Mr. Nitrogen stressed the importance of getting to know one's school building because the most powerful way for school principals to change their building was to get to know their building first. It was also important for Mr. Nitrogen to have his assistant principals and other administrative team members actively involved and engaged with day-to-day school matters in and out of the classroom.

> We had a code of conduct which was, you know, it was external parent and student facing and it just articulated expectations and consequences for infractions. You know, we had internal discipline set of policies for staff members. things that we implemented at the school level. As school leaders, they were devoting a lot of professional development around the quality of academic instruction right, that ultimately behavior and discipline is again a manifestation of whether or not students are engaged in your class, whether or not your competent instruction, whether or not lessons are interesting. So, we spend a lot of time on professional development. (Mr. Carbon)

Mr. Carbon shared the steps he took as a school principal to strengthen staff development. He stressed the questions he would ask his staff about classroom instructional practices and the link between strong instruction in the classroom and student (mis)behavior.

> Never allowed a teacher to remove a student from class. The burden was on the adults. Have adults unpack and deconstruct the behavior. Establish a teacher panel that would review the behavior; leaders can reconstruct the architecture of the school day. (Mr. Carbon)

Mr. Helium spoke about the role adults played when it came to discipline in school. The adults were responsible for managing the behavior of students in a constructive and responsive manner that was also respectful to students. Staff were not allowed to kick students out of the classroom. Mr. Hydrogen spoke about the role of the classroom teacher on student behavior, sharing that the adults in the school building were the first line of defense when it came to student discipline.

> Policy procedure was everything…the classroom teacher was the best person to address health, welfare and safety in a school. So, my expectation was…that you would intervene, you know, you would try to create an environment that would prevent…issues that occurred in a classroom. My role was simply not that (I won't use the word interrogate but, you know), the first question out of my mouth was, what did you do teacher, what did you do, what was your response? So the policy was that, but I also had to make sure that they were equipped with the skills, the dispositions to do that well. So it wasn't that I would just create a mandate, but you know we were providing sessions and opportunities to learn different techniques to better understand behavior to understand child development. (Mr. Hydrogen)

Mr. Hydrogen discussed the role of the teacher when managing student behavior in the classroom as well as school principal actions and strategies to equip teachers to better manage student behavior in a culturally relevant and antiracist manner. Mr. Hydrogen explained that it was important to not only critique teachers' actions but to offer them support that will help them grow as teachers with more culturally relevant strategies and tools.

Ms. Copper spoke about revamping the protocols for adults in the building. She highlighted the need to focus on adult behavior in the school building to have a greater impact on school culture. This focus allowed school leaders to investigate culturally relevant resources and strategies for teachers and staff, by which they can create an antiracist environment for all students.

> Well, first of all, the deans could not make decisions all by themselves to suspend…. Sometimes, it wasn't even an articulation with the principal, why he's getting suspended. "Well, what do you mean there has to be a discussion?" and, you know, what did you

> find with the investigation, um, and so on…. I revamped the whole protocol of what you know, what had to happen before that decision was made. I added guidance counselors, which was a big help, very expensive, but helps because they, you know, the minimum I think two hundred fifty is allowed in New York State as a caseload and that's way too much. So, adding the guidance counselors to make more personalization with the students. (Ms. Copper)

Ms. Copper talked about how she transformed the role of staff in the building that changed the way adults made decisions about disciplinary infractions. She insisted on having staff explain why they wanted to suspend students and what happened before the infraction.

> I wanted to be a part of any sort of discipline that resulted in the multiple-day suspensions…. We had alternatives to suspension, so lots of different ways for kids not to be suspended. So, I tracked data a lot because one of the biggest things I was noticing was when e-cigarettes or vaping came in. It was a huge surge. More kids were missing school, and it was just something I was really nervous about, but it caused me to look at all of our data. So, I would want to be a part of all that, but I really wanted to be on the proactive side. (Ms. Neon)

Ms. Neon echoed Ms. Copper's sentiments about school leader involvement in all disciplinary decisions and referrals.

> As a principal, it was very important for expectations to be clearly expressed to students so that they were clear about what was expected of them. I remember one situation that I walked into as a principal, actually my first situation, where there were a hundred rules. Literally, in the pamphlet, they had a hundred rules. And so, when I would ask the students about the rules, they said, "Well, I have no idea what's in that rule book." And so, what we did was we streamlined the rules and reduced one hundred to ten. Ten rules. And as a result of that, when we would have conversations with children, they were clear when they, let's say, violated a rule. It wasn't no uncertainty about it. And then that helped us have a conversation with them to rationalize what would be the appropriate steps to take. So, we involved the students, in that case, into the process of decision making when it came to suspension. We also engaged in what's called the peer mentoring program and peer mediation programs. Those are programs that help really reduce conflict within the schools. And also, just really in terms of training the deans so that thinking about suspension was not the first step. If anything, that would be the last option and not the first option. (Mr. Oxygen)

Mr. Oxygen shared a story of how he internalized the school rules that were in the school he took over, along with the help of the students. He identified the importance of listening to students and incorporating student supports in the school community. Mr. Oxygen identified the

importance of school leaders understanding their role in teacher development. Classroom management was not limited to student behavior. It was critical for teachers to expand their understanding of student culture to relate better to their students, especially if they were from different backgrounds and cultures.

Another noteworthy aspect of adult behavior in schools was the ability of adults to build strong relationships with students. Creating strong relationships with students made it possible to make positive impacts on student behavior and increase the teacher's cultural understanding and awareness of them. As Ms. Sodium expressed:

> So, I believe that schools have to be safe places for our students. And I believe that we have to address the whole child to really begin to determine what it is that students are struggling. You know, a lot of times we find students who are struggling with discipline are struggling with academic issues as well…. (Ms. Sodium)

Ms. Sodium shared the value of adults in the school community. This contributed to a positive atmosphere where students were culturally relevant and played a part in the school culture and gained a sense of community. To this end, Ms. Nickel also expressed:

> But making sure that we really are giving that safe space for children to learn and be responsive and reevaluating the school on a regular basis to ensure that its meeting the needs of the students when it comes to overall cultural safety as well academic safety…. So that's why I think it's the principals job to really just set the tone to what the whole belief system is in doing that…. There's all this positivity that needs to happen to start again, opening again the hearts and the minds of the students that have been greatly impacted by honestly (and) justice build into systemic roles…. Understand where our students are coming from. (Ms. Nickel)

Ms. Nickel shared that the responsibility of the school leader is to set the tone in the school building, which also included a culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogical approach to reduce the impact of the justice system for students of color in urban schools. The fourth theme identified the value of the adults in the school building and how their behavior affected the behavior of the students. Participants in this study conceptualized the need for school leaders to

provide professional development and resources to help adults change their behavior, in order to change the way students of color were disciplined in their schools. Such professional development highlighted participants values and beliefs of school discipline policies that improved teacher and student interactions and understanding, increasing the ways students of color are supported in schools. Such changes in behavior had a direct impact on how school staff utilized disciplinary measures. The staff also learned how to improve their interaction with students, resulting in stronger relationships and better communication which reduced disciplinary infractions in the school.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I presented four major themes that emerged from the research questions in this study. The following two research questions lay at the center of this study:

1. How do urban school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined?
2. How do the values and beliefs of urban school leaders inform their implementation of school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color?

The first theme that emerged was: *School disciplinary measures should help students, not hurt them*. It is critical to ensure that the disciplinary measures utilized in school communities support students in ways that allow them to grow as students as opposed to limiting them. Participants shared various examples and stories that illustrated how their conceptualization of school discipline policies created opportunities to help scholars grow.

The second theme that emerged was: *School discipline policies dictate principals' action or inaction.* Participants shared their experiences and stories of being able to discipline students as well as restricting them by the discipline policies that were in place. The third theme that

emerged was: *School discipline data requires analysis in order to tell the whole story.* Many examples and stories were shared, including the need to dive deep into the data and fully understand what was being described in relation to the school community.

The fourth and last theme that emerged was: *Focusing on teacher behavior can change student misbehavior.* Participants shared that the ability for school leaders to invest in their staff and the adults in their school community was a powerful way to impact and change adult behavior. Participants expressed that when adult behavior changed, they were more likely to impact student behavior in the classroom.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Paulo Freire)

Some may argue that the challenges and circumstances faced today by Black and Brown students has not changed very much over the last 60 years in the United States. As Horace Mann stated in 1848 (Education and Social Inequity, n.d.), "Education, then, beyond all other divides of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery" (p. 3). Black and Brown students have been left out of this balance wheel. Presently, culturally responsive school leaders in urban schools serve as a bridge for students of color to access this great equalizer of education. The need to identify how urban school leaders conceptualize and implement school discipline policies in ways that support students of color led me to this dissertation study. In this chapter, I present a summary of the interpretations and recommendations for future research, practice, and policy.

Interpretation of Findings

To interpret the findings of this study, I first utilized the Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al., 2011) to organize participants' responses to the interview questions. I classified the interview questions into four different sections to align each with a component of the Framework. The interview questions fell into the following four different sections: background, beliefs, sensemaking, and principal/superintendent decisions (Appendix A). The first finding from the participant interview responses was the notion that school disciplinary measures should help students, not hurt them. This finding highlighted the

participants' responsibility to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence, which described the Professional Duty of a school leader under the Culturally Relevant Leadership (CRL) Framework (Horsford et al., 2011). I interpret this finding of the Professional Duty of a school principal as serving in the interest of students at all times to ensure that all students in the school community can thrive and succeed in a safe learning environment.

One example of how participants served in the interest of their students was to get to know them, spend time with them, and engage them in dialogue in order to identify and meet their needs in pursuit of excellence and equity. It was key for the participants to create meaningful opportunities to interact with their students and learn about how they were doing in school. Participants shared stories of school events, student clubs and lunch time in the cafeteria where they could get all the "dirt" on what was going on (in school) that allowed them to connect with the students. This was even more important for school leaders, especially in the principal role, so students could view them as "human"—someone they could speak with and share their problems, as opposed to an unapproachable strict disciplinarian. When students can connect with the adults in the building and form strong relationships, the exchange can serve as the means to a safe school building and an environment where kids can learn and feel secure. School leaders must be an active and integral part of the school community if they are know the students and understand the need for school discipline. This is reminiscent of the Hippocratic Oath physicians take before seeing patients—do no harm. This finding underlined the necessity for school leaders to identify potential harm from the misuse of discipline policies and ensure such misuse does not occur in their school communities. This also speaks to the necessity of making difficult decisions that may often be unpopular. It is important for school leaders to take away the notion that just because exclusionary school discipline policies are in effect, they do not have to be used every

time a student misbehaves. Instead, staff can speak with students and provide guidance and intervention to help them make better decisions in the future.

The second finding from the participants' interview responses was the idea that school discipline policies dictated principals' action or inaction. This finding highlighted the participants' Political Context within the role, demographic divide, competing values, ideologies, and perspectives under the Culturally Relevant Leadership (CRL) Framework (Horsford et al., 2011). This finding, which outlines the Political Context within which school leaders serve their school systems, highlights the careful balance that principals must operate in to run a school and remain in good standing. School leadership positions are complex roles that balance the needs of the school community and the school system delicately, through competing values and ideologies. The ability to implement policies successfully can be impacted by the competing values and daily demands of the school landscape. These formal leaders are in unique positions where they can move initiatives forward or kill them off, either quickly through actions or slowly through neglect (Murphy et al., 2009).

Many participants shared the difficulty they had changing the way students were disciplined as a result of the discipline policies set forth by the system. I deduced that principals must make decisions formed by their own values and beliefs in order to protect the students in their school communities. If the adults had opposing views and values after a student infraction, the principal must be the one to make the final decision that best serves the student. School discipline policies are mandated by school district leaders and can change over time. While policies will indeed change over time, it is important for school leaders to dissolve the notion that they are the decision makers in schools and should not be restrained by policies that do not serve students.

The third finding from the participants' interview responses was the notion that school discipline data require analysis in order to tell the whole story. This finding highlighted the participants' responsibility to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence, which described the Professional Duty of a school leader under the Culturally Relevant Leadership (CRL) Framework (Horsford et al., 2011). This third finding affirmed the necessity to utilize data instead of the way people feel or customarily do business in schools. With current school discipline disproportionality among students of color as compared to their White peers, the entire school community can better support students of color through the use of data. This data analysis was not limited to disciplinary measures but academic achievement as well. These findings illustrate data-driven decision-making (DDDM), which refers to "teachers, principals, and administrators systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data…to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools" (Marsh et al., 2006, p. 1). While data-driven decision-making has been applied to student academics and achievement, there is a growing need to include school discipline data in this analysis work as well. The application of discipline data analysis by current school leaders is an essential component in their leadership to support students of color in schools.

The use of data analysis with teachers will also serve as an opportunity for teachers and staff alike to understand the impact of the way they discipline students in the classroom. Relative risk ratio calculations is one way school leaders can illustrate the significance of disproportionate disciplinary measures with students in schools, primarily students of color as compared to their White peers. While having access to a broad range of data, teachers and administrators may lack adequate skills and knowledge to identify solutions (Cosner, 2012; Marsh et al., 2006; Means et al., 2011; Olah et al., 2010; Supovitz & Klein, 2003). Another potential challenge includes how

staff make sense of the data as related to their current beliefs and expectations (Young, 2006). It is critical for school leaders to fully understand their school discipline data in order to change the disciplinary climate in their schools and teach their staff about the significance of the discipline data. The role of the principal is demanding and, while complex, requires adapting to the changing needs of the school landscape. It is important for school leaders to take away the notion that they are responsible for understanding and sharing out their discipline data with the entire school community in order to change patterns of disproportionality among students of color. This practice will hold school leaders accountable to lead for equity, engagement, and excellence throughout their leadership.

The fourth and last finding from the participants' interview responses was the idea that focusing on teacher behavior can change student misbehavior. The school leader is responsible for creating learning opportunities for staff and ensuring these offerings of professional development are ongoing for all. School environments change through time with varied student populations, expanding knowledge fields, new responsibilities, and higher social expectations of schools (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). There is a necessity for school leaders to be at the forefront of such change and prepare the school staff accordingly. Changing the way teachers respond to student misbehavior can, in turn, change the way students behave in their classes. Often, teachers are not even aware of their own behaviors that trigger students and result in a disciplinary infraction in the classroom. Recent studies have shown that teachers' judgments might be biased by a student's ethnicity (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004; KMK, 2010; Thill, 2001). This finding highlighted the participants' Pedagogical Approach as a school leader, which focused on culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy under the Culturally Relevant Leadership (CRL) Framework (Horsford et al., 2011). Teacher bias and prejudice may

often result in student reactions that lead to disciplinary consequences for students, completely disregarding the behavior and action of the adults in the entire infraction. This identifies the need to incorporate culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy into staff training and preparation in order to fully understand how their actions and behaviors can impact students who are from different backgrounds and cultures. It is important for school leaders to take away the notion that they are responsible to center teacher training and preparation in their buildings on culturally relevant and antiracist beliefs in order to create positive learning environments where students of all backgrounds can succeed and be free of racist and bias school disciplinary measures.

Implications for Policy and Practice

When I used the words *disrupting disproportionality* in this study title, I identified disruption in two ways. The first disruption referred to the disproportional disciplinary rates of students of color in schools. The second was the disruption of the way adults in school buildings support students of color to succeed, consequentially increasing student learning and closing the achievement gap. One of the ways the findings from this study can impact school leadership practice is by changing the language that is used in the MPPR rubric for school leaders in New York City (Danielson, 2013) and beyond. Currently, the language that describes *culture* in Domain 2-School Culture and Instructional Program does not include the word *discipline*. Including the focus of discipline within the make-up of school culture will change the way school leaders perceive the value of disciplinary order in their schools and also impact school discipline data in their buildings. Additionally, changing the components of the *capacity* building section in Domain 3-Safe, Efficient, Effective Learning Environment (Danielson, 2013) will increase school leaders' ability to create and assess student discipline data. The rubric limits the language of capacity building to stakeholder input without mention of discipline data. The use of

discipline data analysis will also impact the leadership practice of school leaders in urban schools as a result of their identification of trends and patterns, as evidenced by the school discipline data in their buildings with particular student subgroups. Ongoing review and assessment of their data will change the scope of their work and collaboration with other members of the school community. The use of this rubric with the mentioned changes will also impact how supervisors support school leaders in student discipline data by forcing them to include this work in school evaluations.

In order to impact the way students of color are disciplined in school, school leaders need a plan that identifies the following components: school-wide discipline philosophy, administrative support staff to help the principals implement the discipline philosophy, teacher training to increase culturally relevant awareness in the classroom, and a discipline data analysis plan structure. School leaders will also have to assess how they are managing the root cause of student behavior as opposed to just managing the function of the behavior. School leaders will need to assess how the school environment impacts students' behavior, which is inclusive of teacher and staff behavior in the school. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory identifies the child's interaction with the surrounding environment as complex, such complexity can then appear in the child's development, and fuel the child's physical and cognitive development through time (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). School leaders must also include parents and guardians as partners in this work in order to identify the root causes of student disciplinary problems and challenges displayed in the school community. It is also noteworthy to highlight the impact school leaders that have similar backgrounds to their students have on their schooling experience, specifically the impact black principals have on black students (Lomotey, 2019) and additionally the way they are disciplined at school. It is important for members of the school

community to fully understand the impact that repetitive exclusionary disciplinary measures have on their students, and how it impacts students' outlook and esteem when they are treated differently from their peers.

With the use of this revised rubric language to evaluate schools, school leaders can include these aspects of teacher development and data analysis in their staff handbook and year-long professional development planning. The decision to focus on this work will no longer be optional for staff, and the rubric will serve as a reference for staff who need guidance on understanding the reason for this type of work and the value of eliminating disproportional disciplinary measures for students of color.

Another implication for practice is the creation of a professional development series for school leaders that would prepare them to teach their staff about the culturally relevant and responsive school leadership frameworks that focus on creating positive and welcoming school environments for their students. Professional development is a structure used by school leaders to introduce new learning to school staff through a series of timed presentations over a span of weeks or months. The slide show titled: "Disrupting Disproportionality: Connecting Culturally Relevant & Responsive Practices in the Classroom" (Appendix G) is a sample professional development session that school leaders can hold with their staff and school community in order to introduce the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (Khalifa, 2016), the Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al.'s, 2011), the New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (2019) and particular components that serve as an introduction for teachers and school staff. These Frameworks serve as a bridge for school community stakeholders to link culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2005) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 1994) to overarching school practices. In order to provide

an overarching introduction for the school community, the particular components are identified with specific teacher actions that can be discussed for implementation tips and strategies. The first component used in this professional development session is Khalifa et al.'s (2016) *Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment* Behavior of Culturally Responsive School Leaders. The second component in this professional development session is The New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (2019) Welcoming and Affirming Environment that includes the: Collective responsibility to learn about student cultures and communities, Close relationships with students and families, Social-Emotional Learning Programs and Materials that represent and affirm student identities.

New policies must be created that solely focus on teaching school leaders about culturally relevant and antiracist school discipline policies which they can incorporate into their own school buildings. School leaders must understand the negative impact of repetitive exclusionary disciplinary measures on students of color. While the change of particular language in the MPPR used to evaluate school leaders can impact school leadership practice, it can also impact school leadership policy. Culturally relevant leadership learning and understanding must be displayed through a new school leader evaluation rubric that demands principals provide examples of how they are supporting students in their building while reducing the disproportionate number of students receiving disciplinary measures. The transformation of school leadership policies to include culturally relevant practices and evidence is not steadfast in school leader evaluation rubrics. Having school leaders evaluated on their capability to learn about, comprehend, and apply student cultures and backgrounds to the everyday lived experiences of students (and increase students' opportunity to connect with and feel a sense of belonging with the school community) will impact the way culture is identified and planned for in the following MPPR

Domains: 1-Shared Vision of Learning, 2-School Culture and Instructional Program, and 4-Community (Danielson, 2013). When school leader evaluations reflect these two areas of leadership, school leaders will be forced to focus on them as it will impact their yearly evaluation score. These changes to MPPR rubric will change the way school leaders assess school success regarding school vision of learning, school culture and instructional program, school safe learning environments, and school community.

Schools today have changed in areas such as student demographics, curriculum, and instructional preparation. Unfortunately, that is not always true for school discipline. Many schools continue to use the same strategies to discipline students that were used in the 1990s, the Zero-Tolerance era of school discipline that was initiated by the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA, 1994). The continual use of exclusionary discipline practices on students of color must change in every school system in order to provide viable learning opportunities and outcomes for all students of color in this country. School leader preparation programs must be revamped in order to support new leaders with strong culturally relevant leadership practices and strategies that will prepare them to lead their schools. The Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al., 2011) can serve as a guide for culturally relevant leadership components of preparation programs.

Specifically, the findings from this study identified four areas that can change the way leadership programs support future school leaders who will be responsible for interpreting and implementing discipline policies. The first implication for preparation was the foundational leadership course on school discipline. Future school leaders must understand how school disciplinary measures can harm students and, in fact, do not help them or the school community. Future school leaders must learn how school discipline policies can be counterproductive in

establishing discipline in schools and must understand their role when it comes to utilizing discipline policies in schools within different contexts. Another change in school leadership preparation, which would have a powerful impact on school culture and environment, would be the development of data analysis skills and understanding for future school leaders. This would be key for school leaders to be ready to internalize and make sense of their discipline data, especially since most may never receive support from their supervisors for this analysis. Student discipline data analysis can have a direct impact on school culture. The use of data analysis practices can be included in teacher and staff professional development to provide a powerful foundation for all members of the school community. School leadership preparation courses can include training and preparation for school leaders to carry out such teacher professional development.

This quantitative data can serve as a powerful tool to show adults in schools the racial disparities that exist in their school buildings. Often, it is difficult for school leaders to bring up the topic of race, racism, bias, and discrimination. The use of discipline data can serve as an introduction to these conversations with school staff, teachers especially who are with students in classrooms for most of their day. The tools to begin a conversation about race and racial disparities in schools as evidenced by actual quantitative data can be the first step to create changes in schools that were consistently using exclusionary practices while not understanding the long-lasting impacts of these practices. These changes in school leadership preparation programs will have an impact on the field of educational leadership, particularly urban education leadership.

If I had never had teachers who cared about me in school, I may have never been accepted into a doctoral program. The way my teachers made me feel was important because it

kept me interested in coming to school and learning. Despite not sharing the same culture or background, my teachers were able to create positive learning environments where I, along with my peers, felt welcomed and a member of the school community, increasing our ability to focus on classroom instruction and not on misbehavior. When students feel like they are part of the school community, they are more successful, and the overall school learning environment is better. This work is important because all students in a school matter. The way students behave and function in their school communities should dictate school ratings and school systems. School discipline has focused too long on removing students from the school setting in order to remove the problem, yet the problem has not gone away. For over 50 years, no remedy or solution has been found to decrease students' disproportionate discipline data. I would go as far and state the problem has only gotten worse.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are recommendations for additional research in the areas of urban education leadership, school discipline policies, and culturally relevant leadership/racial equity.

1. This study was limited to participants with at least 5 years' principal experience. Future research could include participants with more years of experience to capture their perspectives on building relationships with students, student discipline policies, and culturally relevant leadership/racial equity.
2. This study was limited to 12 participants. Future research could include more participants of color as well as a proportional number of men and women in the study. The addition of more participants from different backgrounds and perspectives could possibly impact the responses to the interview questions. This study only included

two Latino participants, three White participants, and seven African American participants. Additionally, there were only four women and eight men in the study.

3. This study was limited to participants with principal experience in urban schools. Future research could include participants from suburban and rural schools to include their perspectives on how culturally relevant school leaders conceptualize school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color, as well as how their values and beliefs inform their implementation of school discipline policies in ways that support the education of students of color.
4. Finally, this study was limited to students of color in urban schools. Future research could include additional student subgroups such as students with disabilities, LGBTQ, students in temporary housing, and English language learners.

There is a need to continue the research on school discipline policy in order to understand why students of color are disproportionately disciplined. Research has suggested that much of the students' school-based misconduct is caused by persistent forms of cultural and personal trauma (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Oudshoorn, 2016). Additionally, such youth can exhibit symptoms that are comparable to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is usually observed among military personnel and/or victims of war (Ardino, 2012; Abram et al., 2013). Also, many of the adolescents that are subject to the harshest forms of punishment are also from communities that are traumatized by poverty, violence, underemployment, poor nutrition, education, and health care, resulting in adolescents who are offensive, defensive, and ill-equipped to manage the structured and stressful environment of public school (Centers for Disease Control &Prevention, 2014; Oudshoorn, 2016). There remains a lack of understanding and resources to address such impacts of trauma. Schools persistently identify discipline problems as those within the students,

and miss the circumstances that *surround* the students, or identifying problematic school structures themselves (Schiff, 2018).

Disproportionality in school discipline is one of the most challenging problems in education (Losen et al., 2015; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013). Many years of research have identified students of color, in particular African American male students, at a significantly higher rate of receiving exclusionary disciplinary measures (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The need to change the disproportionality of Black and Brown students receiving disciplinary measures was echoed by the participants in my study. Such disparities may be partially due to implicit bias (Girvan et al., 2017; Staats, 2014), the race of students (Goff et al., 2014), student disabilities (Kelly & Barnes-Holmes, 2013; Wilson & Scior, 2014), or the combination of both. As noted by Skiba et al. (2011), when it comes to school discipline, evidence has shown that implicit bias comes from research showing increased disproportionality for student incidents that are more subjective and, as a result, require more teacher judgment. All of these researchers highlighted the need for more attention and focus on student discipline policy that incorporates identifying how implicit bias impacts disproportionality. Future school discipline policy should include implicit bias as a category in rubrics that would help school leaders evaluate student disciplinary infractions and measures. Additionally, future discipline policy should also include feedback as well as an evaluation score for school leaders (from their supervisors) that will directly impact how school staff evaluate the way their students are being disciplined, and if there is in fact or bias from the personnel responsible for issuing disciplinary measures.

Based on the literature review and the findings from this study, culturally relevant leaders can play an important role in supporting the education of students of color in urban schools.

Despite the changes in disciplinary practices, there has not been a discernable difference in the number of times students of color receive disciplinary measures in school compared to their White peers over the years. There are a few notable implications for policy from this study. In order for school leaders to reduce the disproportionality of students of color receiving disciplinary measures, the following should be incorporated into principal leadership frameworks: School leaders must focus on building relationships as the foundation of the school community and culture at the beginning of the year and throughout. When students in the building have an adult they can connect with and receive guidance and support from, the students will have more opportunities to feel connected to their school, feel safe in their school environment, discuss the way they feel with a caring adult in the school community, and identify successful decision-making steps. This can also include intervention and guidance as part of student schedules throughout the duration of the entire school year. Second, the scope of support and guidance principals receive from their superintendents must include student discipline data that identify patterns or trends with different student subgroups. Superintendents can evaluate school discipline data with principals, provide feedback on the data trends and patterns, and include a score on disciplinary data in the principal yearly evaluation.

Conclusion

For over 30 years, researchers have noted that Black and Brown students receive more disciplinary actions, compared to their White peers (Skiba et al., 2002). These exclusionary disciplinary measures likely increase the odds of school dropout for students and likely predict disproportionately higher rates of criminal involvement for Black and Grown adolescents (Pesta, 2018). There remains a need to focus on the role race plays when analyzing disproportionality and disproportional outcomes for Black and Brown students (Sander & Bibbs, 2020). A data-

driven, culturally relevant and interdisciplinary approach is suggested (Garro et al., 2019; Ingraham, 2000; Nastasi, 2005; Sullivan et al., 2015). In conclusion, it is critical to strengthen school leadership preparation programs through use of the Culturally Relevant School Leadership Framework (Horsford et al., 2011) to better support students of color in schools.

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Appendix A

Interview #1 Protocol

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Start Time of Interview: _____ End time of Interview: _____

Introduction to Interview: Context (5 minutes)

1. Appreciation & Introduction

Thank you very much for making time to share your insights and experiences. I am very grateful that you are willing to talk with me about your experiences as a school principal or former school principal regarding school discipline, in particular, Urban Education Leadership, School Discipline Policies, and Culturally Relevant Leadership. For the purposes of my study, I will be examining how urban school leaders conceptualize current school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined and how their values and beliefs informed their implementation of school discipline policies to support students of color. THANK YOU! Also, thank you for signing and returning the consent form. Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything else at this time? [If yes, I will answer the participant's question(s).]

In case helpful, I'd like to confirm once more before we start the interview, is it still okay with you for me to audio-record our interview? Also, I would like to confirm with you—in order to honor your time—is it still okay with you if our interview lasts between 60-90 minutes?

2. Overview of Purpose and Goals

Thank you again for making the time to share your experiences and knowledge around School Disciplinary Policies. As a gentle reminder, I invited you to participate in this research study because you have at least five years' experience as an urban school principal are a school principal. The purpose of my research is to identify the steps and actions you have taken and implemented in your school to create a school community with low Relative Risk Ratios for school suspensions.

Today, we begin with the first interview that should last 60-90 minutes.

As you may remember, I am currently a middle school principal in a New York City Public School and know very well how demanding our job can be. I am most passionate about helping students learn and close the achievement gap that exists between students of color in urban schools. I hope to learn from you as an expert in the field to better prepare other middle principals on how they can create school communities with low Relative Risk Ratios in student suspensions of color.

I am conducting this research to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how you, as a practicing school principal in New York City, describe and understand equity, how you created an equitable school disciplinary policies and procedures which have resulted in equitable suspension rates. Your responses to these questions will help me answer my research questions.

There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand *your personal experience as a leader who has implemented protocols and practices that create equitable suspension rates for all students in your school.* My goal is to learn from you. Thank you *so very much*, in advance, for your help and time.

3. Confidentiality

In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality in order to protect your privacy. I may quote things that you say but I will never use your name unless I have your permission. If you prefer, you can use an alias instead of your real name for my study. Also, I want to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you prefer not to answer.

4. Questions

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know.

Interview Questions

(55 minutes)

Background

1. How long have you been in your current role?
2. How long did you serve as principal in the New York City Department of Education?
3. How long did you serve as superintendent in the New York City Department of Education?
4. How much of your role focused on discipline as a principal? Were you prepared for this aspect of your role?
5. How much of your role focused on discipline as a superintendent? Were you prepared for this aspect of your role?
6. School discipline has become a serious issue in education, particularly when it comes to the disproportionate discipline of Black and Latina/o students. How would you describe school discipline today? What are the major issues and which students are most affected?

Beliefs

7. What is your philosophy regarding school discipline?
8. How do you see the role of principals on discipline/suspensions rates? How have policies, practices, and procedures affected their role?
9. Related to the question of discipline is equity, since students of color are being disciplined at disproportionate rates. Do you believe this is a result of *Zero Tolerance* policies? And/or *School to Prison Pipeline Models*?

Sensemaking

10. How do you make meaning of school district discipline data?
11. Do you work with others or collaborate with others to make meaning of school district discipline data?
12. How do you make meaning of New York's City Disciplinary Regulations?

Principal & Superintendent Decisions

13. What steps or procedures did you incorporate into your school regarding school discipline when you were Principal? Superintendent?
14. Did you have Zero Tolerance policies in your school? In your district?
15. Did you have protocols and programs that embodied the School to Prison Pipeline in your school? In your district?
16. Did you have protocols and programs that embodied Restorative Justice in your school? In your district?
17. What do you think you did well as principal in your school regarding student discipline?
    How do you know? Give me some examples.
    Do you use a rubric? If yes, which one?
    Do you receive feedback? If yes, from who?
    How do you receive this feedback? In what form? (formal, informal, verbal, written)

Do you receive an evaluation score from your supervisor, what are some next steps or recommendations you have received? Give me some examples.

18. What do you think you did well as superintendent in your school regarding student discipline?
    How do you know? Give me some examples.
    Do you use a rubric? If yes, which one?
    Do you receive feedback? If yes, from who?
    How do you receive this feedback? In what form? (formal, informal, verbal, written)
    Do you receive an evaluation score from your supervisor, what are some next steps or recommendations you have received? Give me some examples.
19. What do you think are the major challenges regarding school discipline disproportionality?
20. How would you remedy/repair the disproportionality rates of school suspension and disciplinary measures between African American, Latino and Students with Disabilities and Asian and White students?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Timeline of Participant Interviews and Research Analysis

	Writing	Data Collection	Data Analysis
April 2019	Receive feedback from Dr. Horsford		
May 2019	Revise chapters and hold Proposal Hearing		
June 2019	Revise chapters		
July 2019	Revise chapters		
August 2019	Revise chapters		
September 2019	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
October 2019	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
November 2019	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
December 2019	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
January 2020	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
February 2020	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
March – August 2020	COVID/		
September 2020			

	Receive clearance from IRB Prepare for Interviews		
October 2020		Conduct interviews 1-2	Writing analytic memos; transcription and verification
November 2020	**Submit C4 to advisor** begin drafting Chapter 5	Begin putting together a draft of dissertation	
December 2020	**Submit C5 to advisor**	Complete putting together a draft of dissertation	
January 2021	Receive Feedback from Dr. Horsford		
February 2021	Dissertation Defense w/Committee		

Appendix C

Potential Participants

Potential Participant	Category
Lester W. Young, Ed.D	K-12
Bernard Gassaway, Ed.D	Higher Education
Henry Rubio	K-12
Shamus Brady	K-12
Everett Hughes	Education Consultant
Jabali Sawicki	Education Consultant
Alison Nisbeth, Ed.D.	K-12
Cecily Wilson, Ed.D.	K-12
Anthony Orzo	Education Consultant
Ixchell Gonzalez	K-12
Phyllis Reggio Ed.D	Higher Education
Rudy Crew, Ed.D.	Higher Education

Appendix D

Letter of Invitation

Protocol Title: Disrupting Disproportionality: An Examination of Culturally Relevant Leadership Approaches to School Discipline in Urban Education
Protocol Number: 3336
Indira Mota
Teachers College, Columbia University

Dear Colleague:
My name is Indira Mota and I am currently the Principal of Abraham Lincoln Intermediate School 171, a public New York City middle school in District 19, Brooklyn. I am writing to you because you were identified as having at least five years-experience as a public urban school principal.

I am writing to invite you to participate in research that I am conducting as part of my doctoral dissertation in the Organizational Leadership Department at Teachers College, Columbia University. This research focuses on *how urban school leaders conceptualize current school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined and how their values and beliefs informed their implementation of school discipline policies to support students of color*. The anticipated duration of the participation would be a 55-60 minute interview that would take place via a Zoom meeting.

My goal for my study, based on what I learn in this research, is to help other school leaders better understand how they can conceptualize school discipline policies to support students of color in their schools.

In return for your participation, you will be provided with a copy of my research findings. If you are interested and you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me so we can arrange an initial phone call. Thank you very much for your thoughtful consideration. If you would like to learn more about my research, I would be happy to address any questions that you have. I can be reached via email at iim2102@tc.columia.edu or via cell phone at 305-494-6529.

Sincerely,

Indira Mota, Principal
Abraham Lincoln Intermediate School (IS 171)

Appendix E

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Disrupting Disproportionality: An Examination of Culturally Relevant Leadership Approaches to School Discipline in Urban Education

Principal Researcher: Indira Mota, Teachers College
305-494-6529, IMota2@schools.nyc.gov

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called "Disrupting Disproportionality: An Examination of Culturally Relevant Leadership Approaches to School Discipline in Urban Education." You may qualify to take part in this research study because you have at least five years-experience as a public urban school principal. Approximately 8 people will participate in this study and it will take 1 and a half hours of your time to complete over the course of one day.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE? This study is being done to learn how urban school leaders conceptualize current school discipline policies in ways that change the way students of color are disciplined and how their values and beliefs informed their implementation of school discipline policies to support students of color.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? If you decide to participate, the primary researcher will individually interview you. During the individual interview you will be asked questions about your background as a school leader, your beliefs as a school leader and how you make sense of your discipline data as a school leader.

This interview will be audio-recorded via a Zoom call. After the audio recording is written down (transcribed) the audio recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will still be able to participate. The researcher will just take hand-notes. The interview will take approximately sixty minutes. You will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep your identity confidential.

All of these procedures will be done at a mutually agreed upon time that is convenient to you. Individual interviews will be conducted face-to-face via a Zoom call. I will plan on recording the interview in order to accurately capture everything that is said during the interview. I will inform you when the recording has begun and ended at all times**.** I will state "This interview will be audio-recorded. You can choose whether or not you would like to be audio-recorded. If you choose to be audio-recorded, the researcher will notify you when the audio-recorder is started

and stopped. If you do not want to be audio-recorded, the researcher will take hand-notes." The interview will not impinge on your work time, it will be carried out after work hours in the convenience of your office or another agreed upon location.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel awkward or embarrassed to discuss your school discipline data.
You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. I will minimize risks by using false names or pseudonyms to protect your privacy. Before the start of the interview we can review your informed consent form if needed to ensure you understand how your information will be kept confidential. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your supervisor. Your information will be kept confidential. All information gathered through this study will be stored according to the prescribed Teachers College data security plan.

The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of school leadership to better understand how principals make sense of their discipline data.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY? You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a closet in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio recording will be written down and the audio recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study

will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED? The results of this study will be included in chapters 4 and 5 of my doctoral dissertation and may be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, **you will still be able to participate** in this research study. I will hire professional transcriptionists, to transcribe audio-recorded interviews.

_____I give my consent to be recorded

_____

Signature

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded

_____

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___I consent to allow written, and/or audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

___I **do not** consent to allow written, and/or audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes _____ No_____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Indira Mota, at 305-494-6529 or at IMota2@schools.nyc.gov . You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Horsford at 212-678-3921.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion in the event the participant no longer fulfills the selection criteria.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative).
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____
Signature: _____

Appendix F

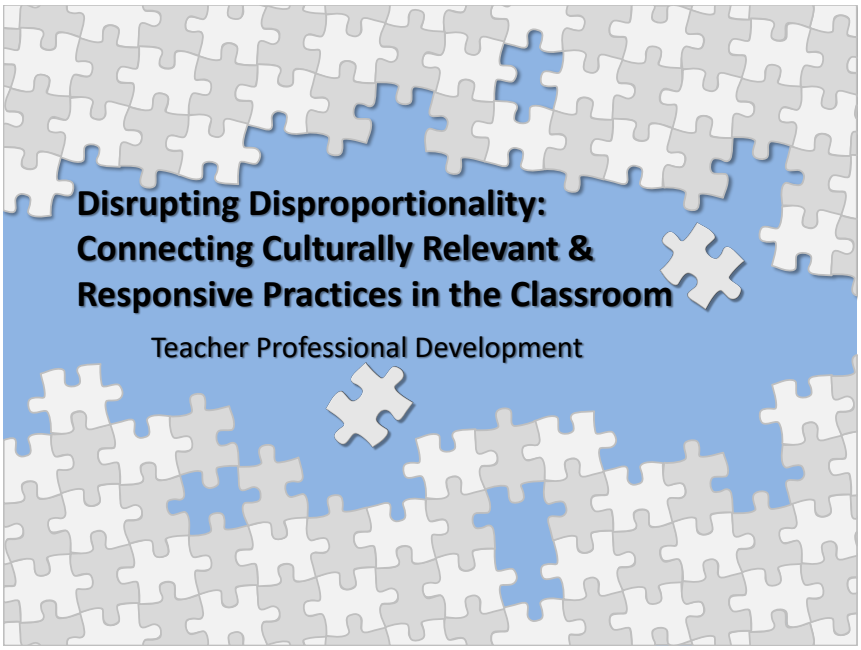
Preliminary Code List

Behavior
Detention
Suspension
Discipline
Teacher Expectations
Management
Student Goals
Teacher Goals
Focus Students
Protocols
Expectations
Student Outcomes
Areas of Growth

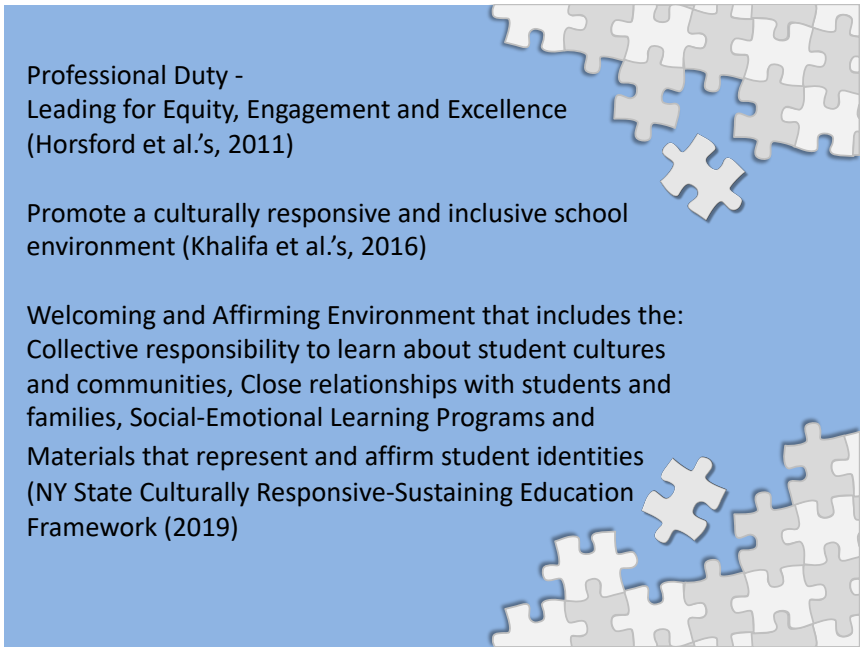
Appendix G

Sample Principal Slide Show for Teacher Professional Development

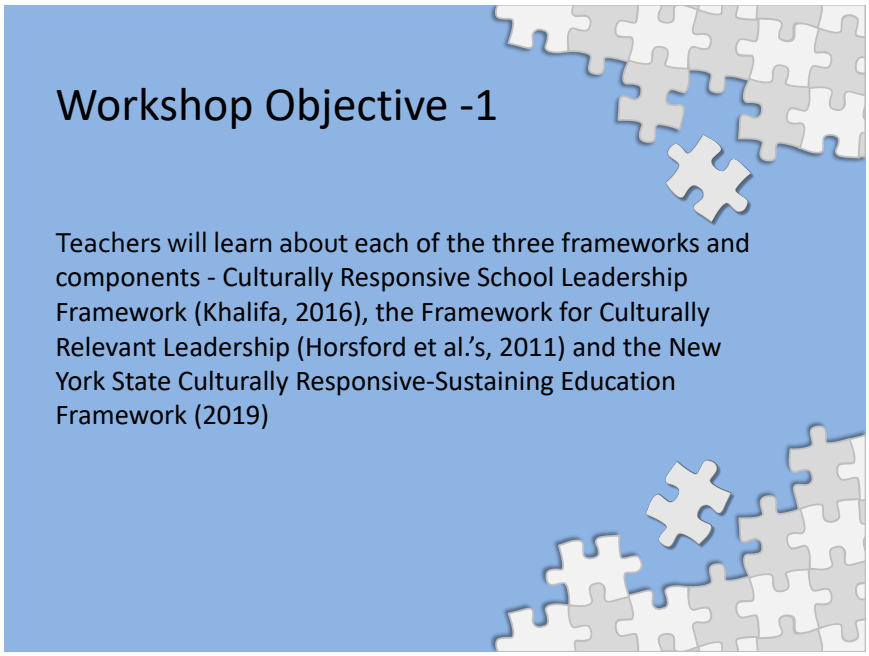
Slide 1 – Title Slide – Disrupting Disproportionality: Connecting Culturally Relevant & Responsive Practices in the Classroom. Principals provide a brief introduction the PD.



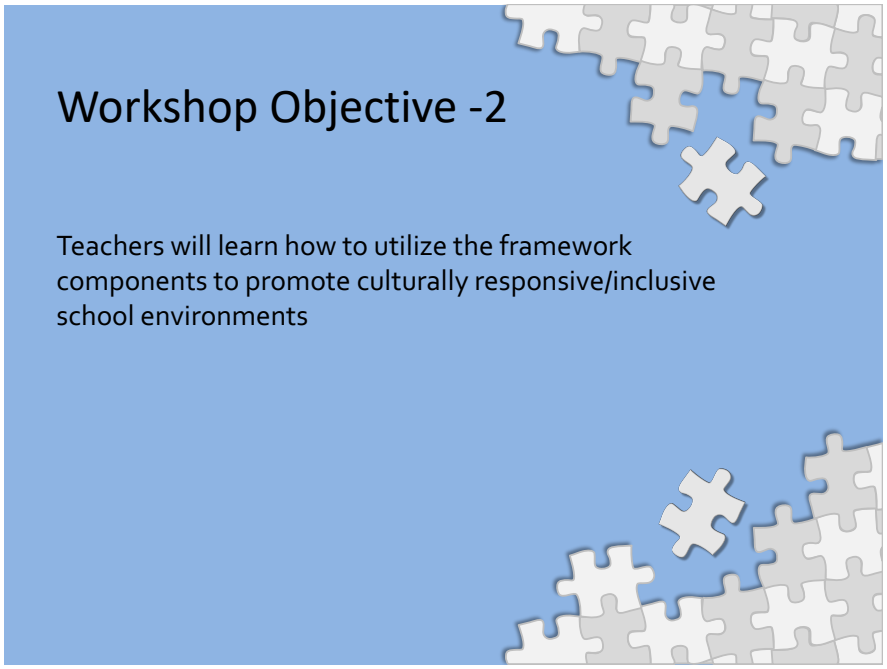
Slide 2 – Frameworks - Principals provide a brief introduction to each of the three frameworks and components - Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (Khalifa, 2016), the Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership (Horsford et al.'s, 2011) and New York State Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (2019)



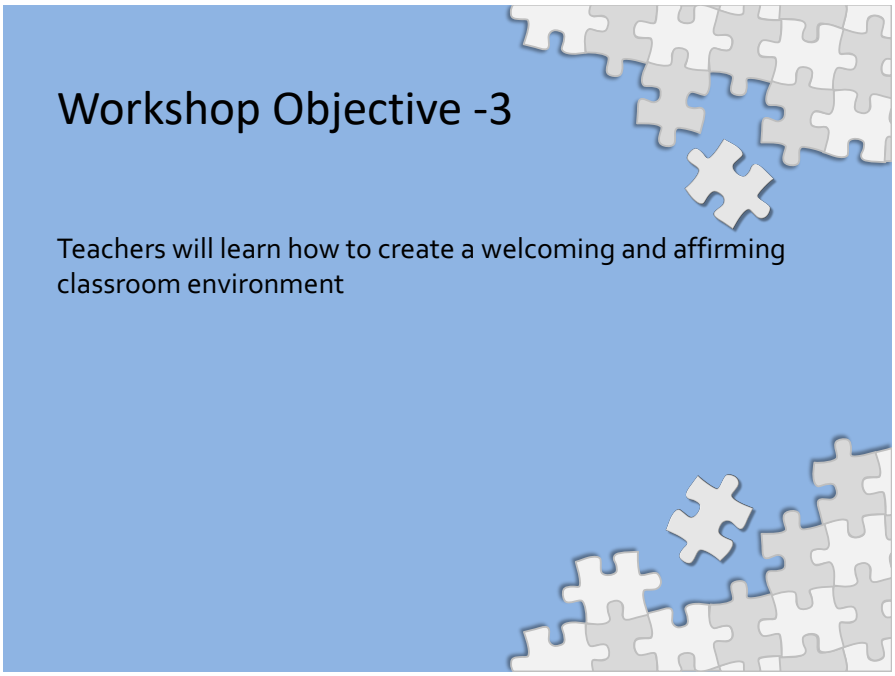
Slide 3 – Workshop Objective 1 - Principals provide the workshop objective for the professional development session to the staff.



Slide 4 – Workshop Objective 2 - Principals provide the workshop objective for the professional development session to the staff.

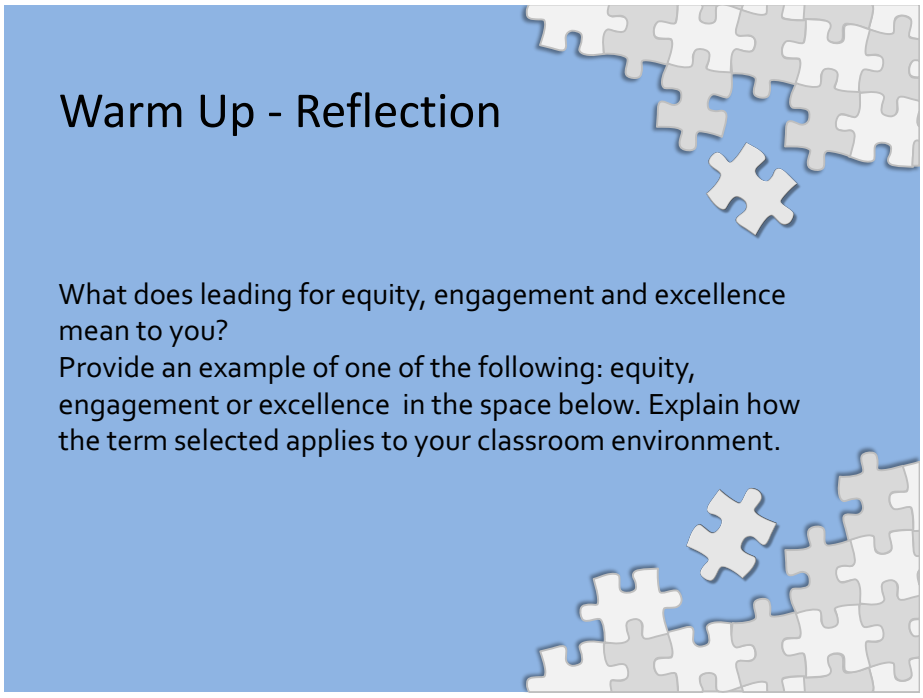


Slide 5 – Workshop Objective 3 - Principals provide the workshop objective for the professional development session to the staff.



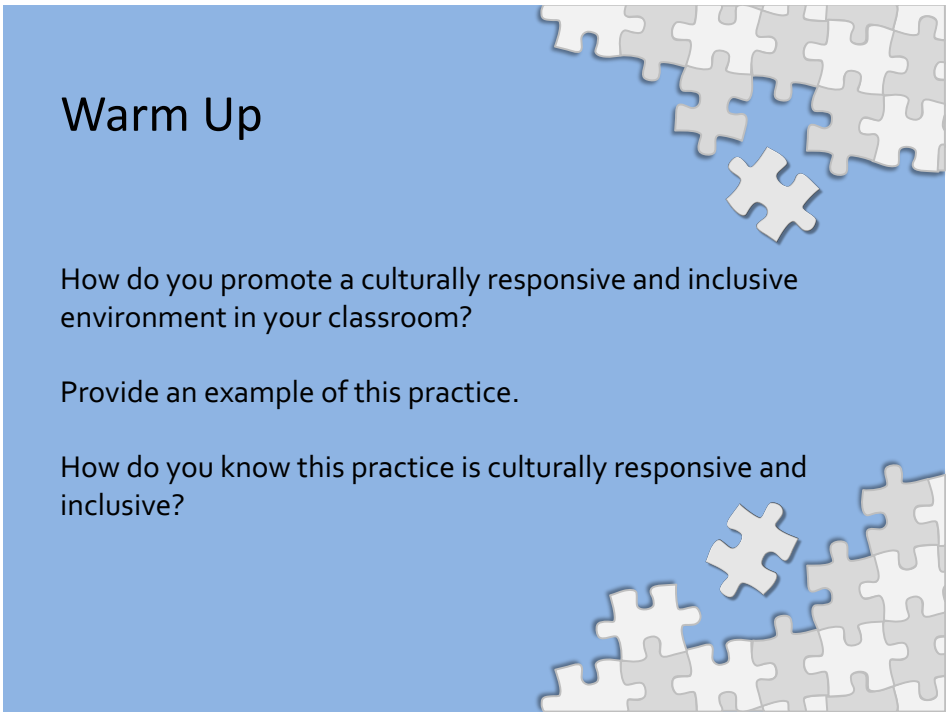
Slide 6 – Professional Duty – Leading for Equity, Engagement and Excellence. Principal will share out what this means to them and the significance of this *Duty* in the school environment.

Slide 7 – Warm Up/Reflection - Principals will ask participants to answer the question below and provide an example for one term. Participants will then be asked to share out their responses out loud and explain why they selected those examples.

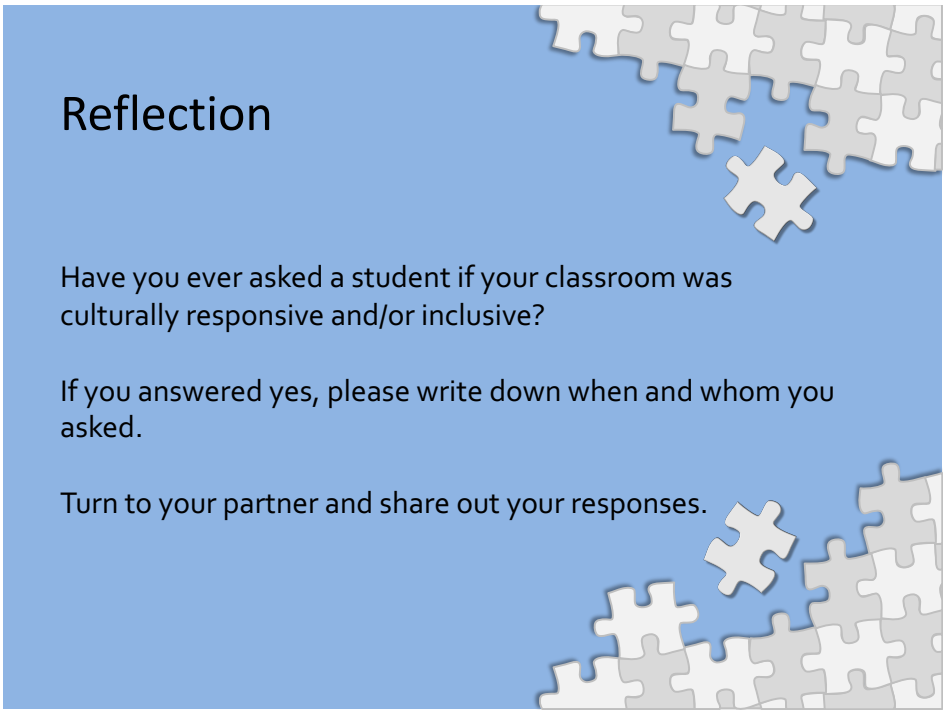


Slide 8 – Principal will now transition to the next section of the pd – Promoting a Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment and introduce activities the staff will take part in.

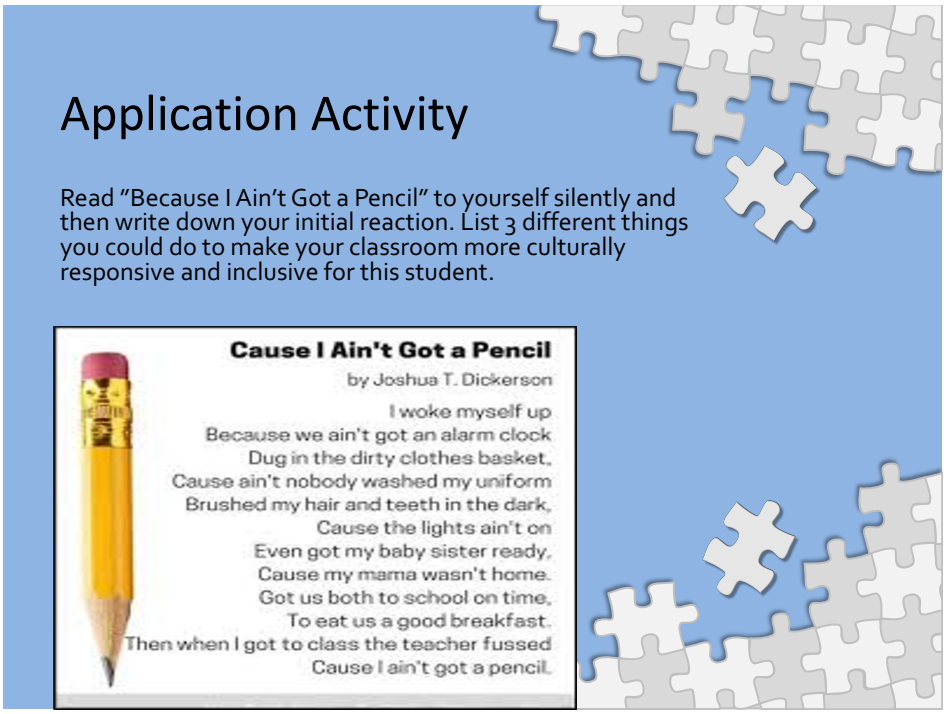
Slide 9 – Warm Up - Principals will ask participants to answer the question below and provide an example. Participants will then be asked to share out their responses out loud.



Slide 10 – Reflection - Principals will ask participants to answer the question below. Participants will then be asked to share out their responses out loud to the person sitting next to them.



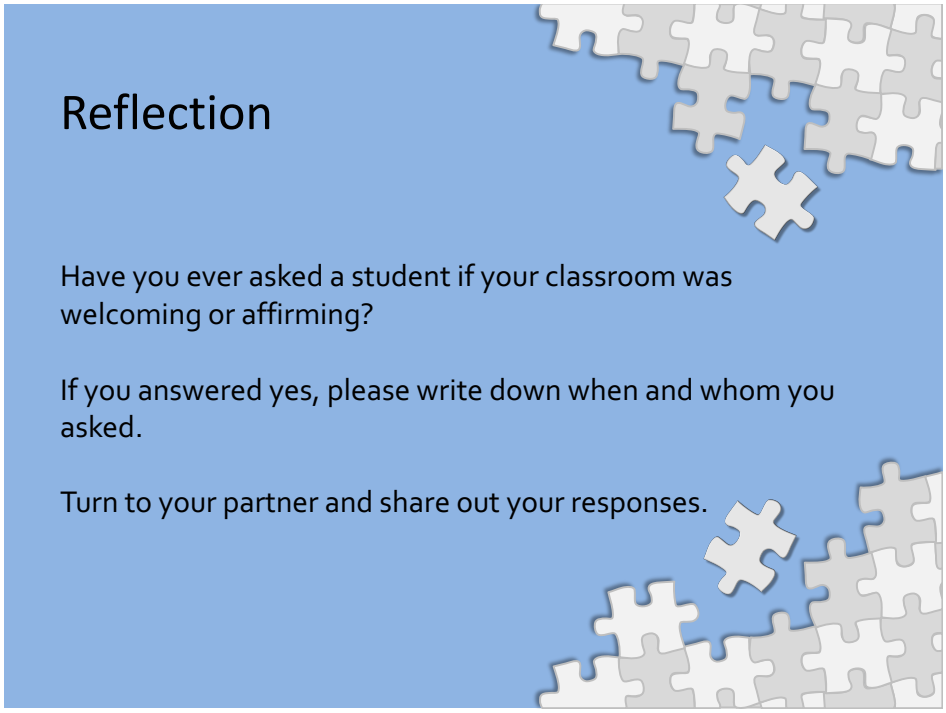
Slide 11 – Application Activity - Principals will ask participants to complete this application activity in order to become familiar with Dickerson's poem and complete the activity. Volunteers will be called on to share out their responses.



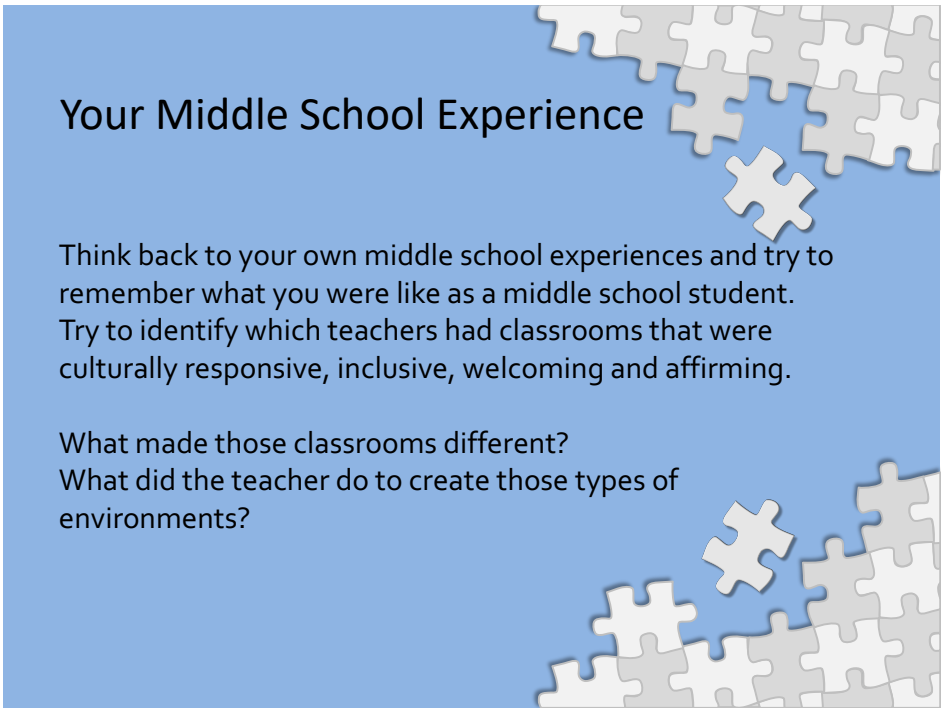
Slide 12 – Welcoming and Affirming Classroom Environment. Principal will share out what this means to them and the significance of this component in the school environment.

Slide 13 – Warm Up - Principals will ask participants to answer the question below and provide an example. Participants will then be asked to share out their responses out loud.

Slide – 14 - Reflection - Principals will ask participants to answer the question below. Participants will then be asked to share out their responses out loud to the person sitting next to them.

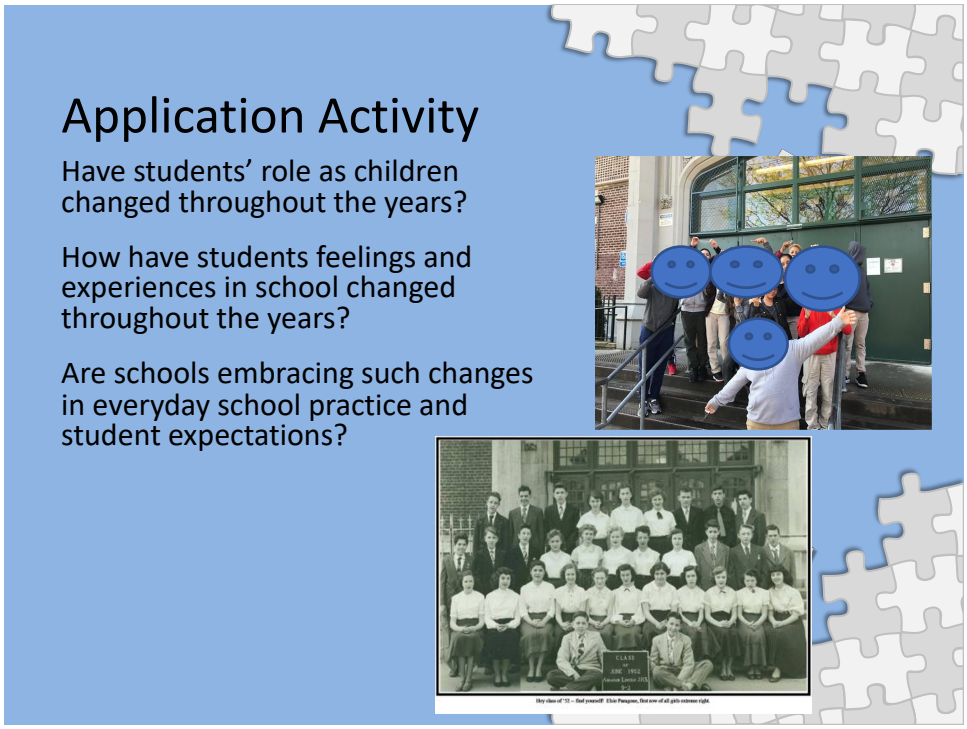


Slide – 15 – Your Middle School Experience - Principals will ask participants to answer the questions below.

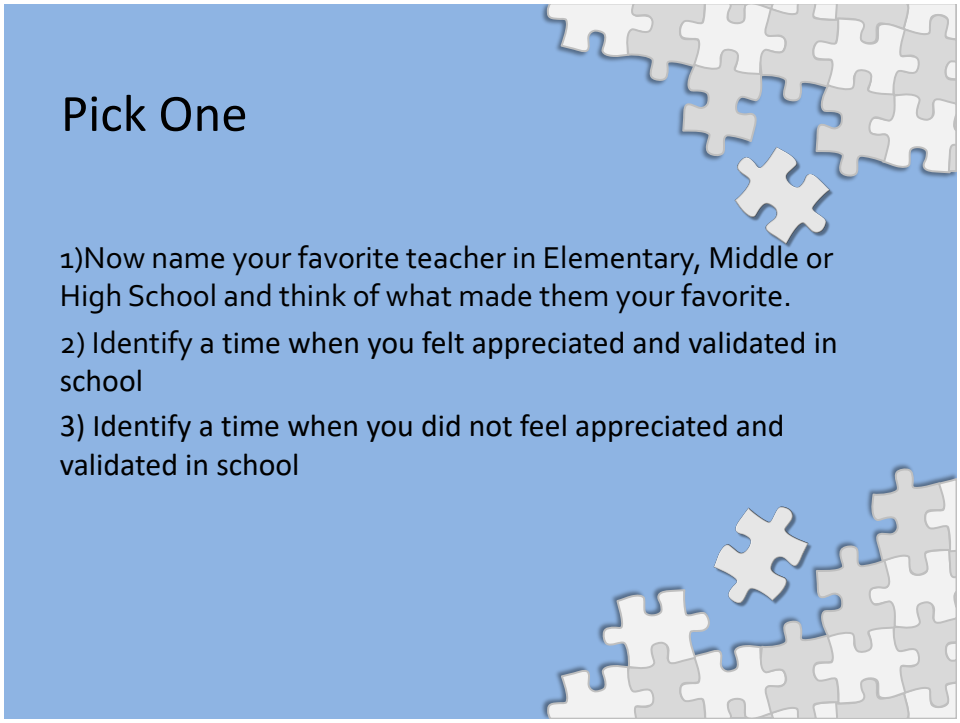


Slide – 16 – My Middle School Experience - Principals will use their own school picture to serve as the anchor for this slide. Participants will be asked to answer the questions below.

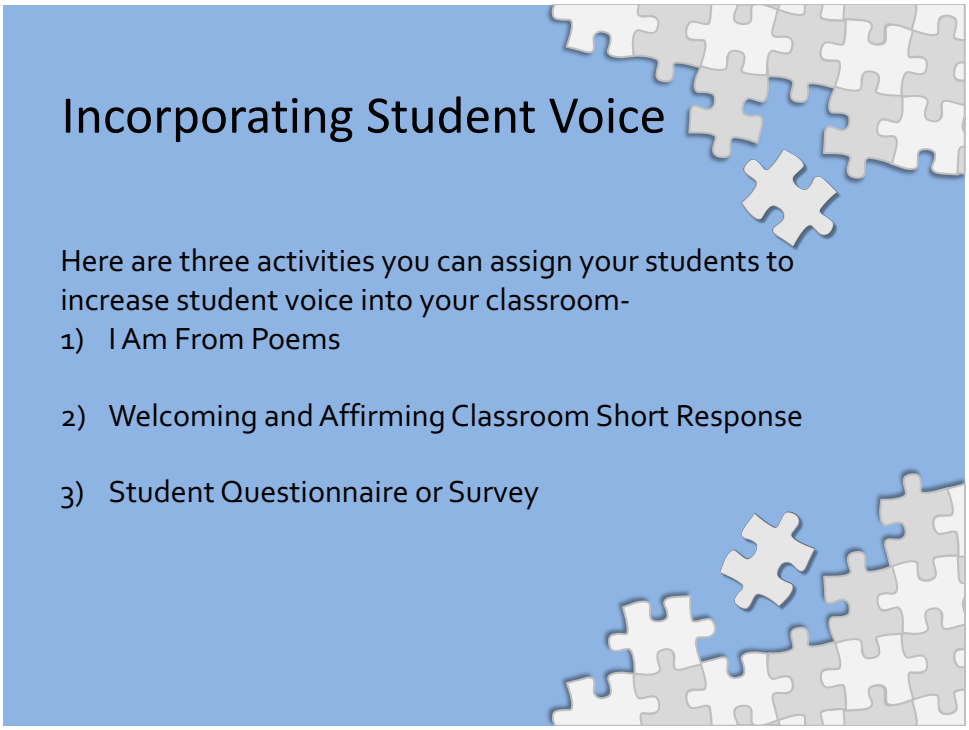
Slide – 17 – Application Activity - Participants will be asked to answer the questions below.



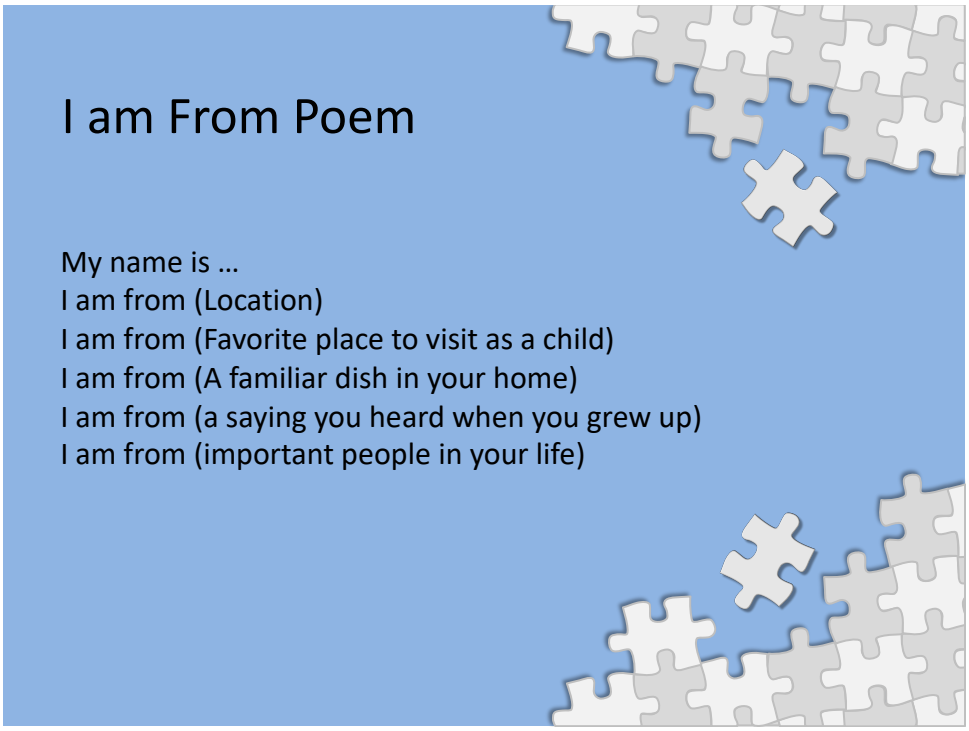
Slide – 18 – Pick One - Participants will be asked to answer the questions below.



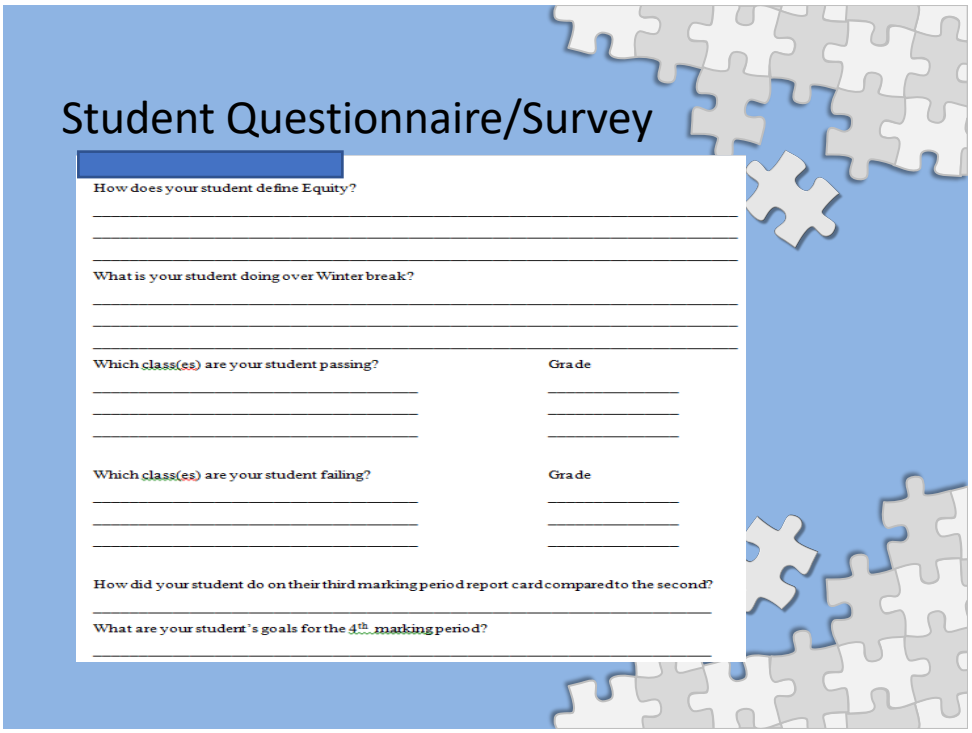
Slide – 19 – Incorporating Student Voice/Classroom Activities



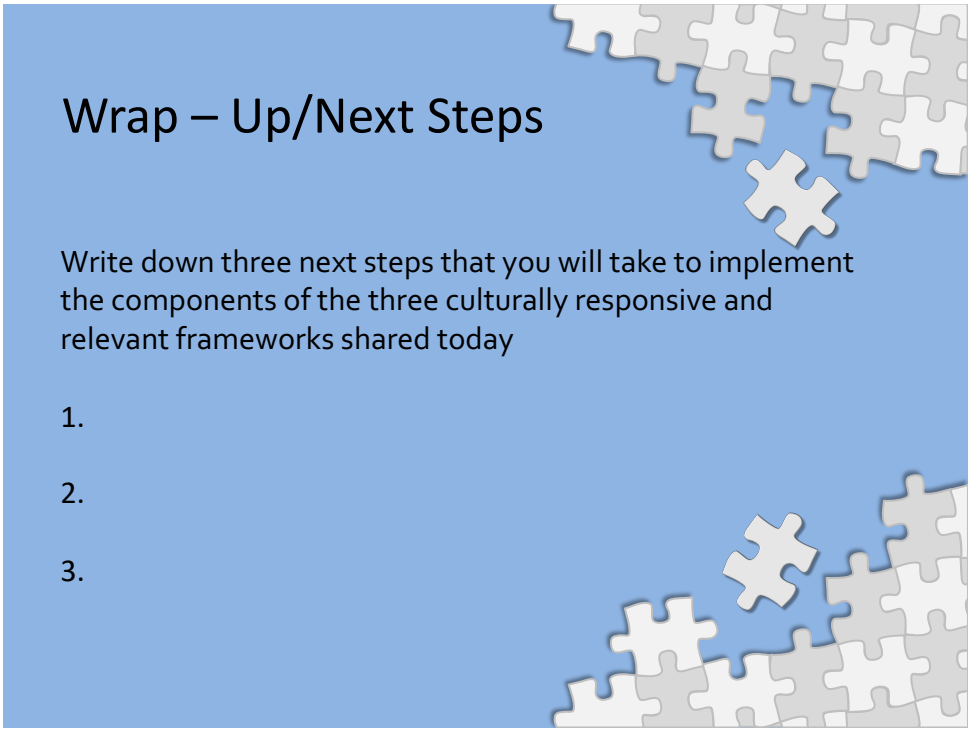
Slide – 20 – Classroom Activity 1 – I Am From Poem



Slide – 21 – Classroom Activity 2 – Student Questionnaire/Survey



Slide – 22 – Wrap-Up/Next Steps



Slide – 23 – Questions and Answers